

A Fens Scrapbook 1897 to 1990

Facts, Features and (occasional) Fallacies  
reported in Cambridge Newspapers

summarised by

Mike Petty

Many of these stories were featured in my 'Looking Back' column in the Cambridge News from 1996-2014. They are supplemented by some selections 'From our Old Files' published in the Cambridge Independent Press and other notes.

The complete 'Cambridgeshire Scrapbooks' of which this is a small section is published online at [bit.ly/CambsCollection](http://bit.ly/CambsCollection)

I have digital and other copies of most of the stories summarised.  
I hope to publish these online one day. If you would like them in the meantime then please get in touch.

The original volumes are housed in the Cambridgeshire Collection at Cambridge Central Library where there are many other indexes dating back to 1770.

They also have detailed newspaper cuttings files on over 750 topics that have been compiled since the 1960s.

Newspapers sometimes get things wrong. I copy things out incorrectly. Do check

There are a multitude of spelling and layout errors. Please forgive or correct them

News never stops but this file was finished on 31 August 2016.

I will maintain supplements and corrections – contact me for anything you need

Please make what use of these notes that you may. Kindly remember where they came from

See my website – [www.mikepetty.org.uk](http://www.mikepetty.org.uk) for further notes.

Mike Petty, Stretham

2016

***Fens Scrapbook 1897-1990***

1897 02 27 c

The clerk to the Ely Guardians applied for the removal of Tabitha Camm, an eccentric old woman aged 72 years who is living in a tumbled-down old hovel in Littleport fen. The place was filthy in the extreme. She has lived there all her life and she tenaciously sticks to it. PC King said the walls were tumbling down and the bricks had no mortar between them. The rain penetrated and soot and dirt covered the place. The lady is independent in every sense of the word and would-be sympathisers are quickly ordered to decamp

1897 09 04 c

By the kindness of a firm of furniture van proprietors, four well-known Cambridge men started upon a fishing expedition for a spot upon the river known as "Dimmock's Cote". Considerable excitement was caused in the fens by the van, many wondering who was to be moved. The few natives were much amused at the novelty, and the cooking of a pan full of savoury Cambridge sausages in the open air brought them round. One afternoon no less than ten visitors were entertained to tea; they were not all gentlemen. Not a dull hour was experienced by anyone of the party

1898 04 01 c

Mr William Howlett, of Newmarket, has recently recorded the capture of several pole cats (an animal asserted to be almost extinct) in the fen district. No doubt the fens are the last stronghold of this animal. He says they exist largely upon eels and frogs in the "dykes", but when these are sealed by frost, they go up to the farmsteads, and cause great loss among the poultry.

1898 08 12 c

Joseph Martin of Littleport told the Agricultural Committee on National Wheat Stores that he was not in favour of a reserve. He said "It is most unremunerative, growing wheat. I am of the opinion that if you could by any means guarantee a better price for wheat there would be many more thousands of acres. I am in the fen district. It is really a wheat growing country. But a good deal of the heavy land has gone out of cultivation entirely and grass has taken the place of wheat"

1899 01 21 c

Herbert Varlow, an agricultural and general engineer, residing and carrying on business at Benwick, Ely, claimed £500 from an engineer and wheelwright of West Fen engine, March. He stated the defendant wrote and published an advertisement in the "Peterborough Advertiser" intending to convey the meaning that his business was for sale and he had become insolvent. As a consequence two customers had broken off business. After the advertisement had appeared his creditors "well rounded on him", several pressed him and one issued a writ. The defendant was a trade rival of his. The jury awarded him £150 damages

1899 02 24 c

Inspectors of the Local Government Board held an inquiry at Newmarket respecting the proposed new main drainage schemes for the district. The sewers had been a source of difficulty and trouble in consequence of its faulty construction. The present sewage farm had caused constant complaints. The method of exposing sewage in trenches or ditches to stagnate was so very unsatisfactory that it was likely to cause a serious nuisance. Last year a scheme had to be abandoned in consequence of the Burwell Fen Commissioners objecting to the discharge of effluent on their fen

1899 03 09 c

Wicken Fen is the last fragment of virgin fen. Portions of the fen are often in the market for sale, and the National Trust are desirous of securing a few acres from time to time, so that they may be retained in their primeval state. It is desirable that this piece of the England of long ago should be retained in order that Englishmen of this and future generations may be able to realise what the fenland was.

1899 04 09 c

The foolhardiness of trespassing on the railway has been strikingly exemplified by a shocking accident near Black Bank station a few miles from Ely. A platelayer after drinking with a friend at the Railway Tavern proceeded homewards along the railway. It was one of the darkness of nights, and the wind, howling across the fens, probably had the effect of making the noise of an approaching train inaudible. Both men had only covered a short distance when one observed the light of a train at close quarters and shouted to his companion, who unfortunately stepped the wrong way and thus met his fate.

1899 08 20 c

Sir - For the past two years I have been cultivating a piece of land at Burwell and selling the produce, which consists chiefly of vegetables, at Cambridge. One piece of this land is in the fen, and one piece is high land. The solicitor for the University claimed tithe rent for the land in the fen. I have proved the piece of land which was under water for years previous to the time of my father and others who drained it, was not titheable. I was tried at the County Court

by the Registrar, who refused to hear my witness, the oldest man in Burwell, who could give evidence as to the history of this matter. Now the bailiff has taken about £20 worth of oats and potatoes for a claim of £2 0s 10d from the piece of land I offered to pay tithe on. Where is justice in this case, after the paying of parson's heavy tithe rent? - Joseph Manning

1899 09 24

An alarming fire took place at Quaker's farm, in the fen near Lt Downham, causing the destruction of a farmhouse and rendering the occupants homeless. Mrs Watson and her washerwoman were just preparing to partake of luncheon when smoke was seen issuing from the thatch near a chimney stack. Pails of water were brought into requisition but had little or no effect. The Fire Brigade from Ely turned up, got a plentiful supply of water from a dyke and managed to extinguish the fire. By this time only the walls and chimney stacks of the old house – built in 1803 – were left standing

1899 10 13 c

A considerable amount of dissatisfaction has arisen in regard to the tithe charge imposed on certain lands in Burwell fen by Cambridge University. The land in question is some 3,000 acres in extent and was formerly under water. Nearly 60 years ago the fen was drained. The greater part is utilised for agriculture, but a portion is cultivated as market gardens. The imposition of a tithe has weighed heavily on the owners and there has been speculation as to the legality of the charge. No tithe was exacted until after the drainage about 1840 and while some owners have paid others have been allowed to go scot free. Now the parish council has purchased ten acres for a public recreation ground and decline to pay the tithe

1899 12 08 c

A bog oak raised from the fen at Bottisham Lode was found to be 100 feet long. When men were splitting it they found in the centre a honeycomb which had also been embedded in the peat. The comb was in a perfect state of preservation and dotted about it were bees. The entrance to the comb was a gigantic knot and it is supposed that when the tree fell this fell directly into the gault, thus making prisoners of the bees which were in it.

1899 12 16 c

The frost continues with great severity in the fens. The University Skating Club at Cambridge was opened yesterday. The ice was fairly thick, but rough. The moors at Littleport were open to the public, but there was practically little skating elsewhere. The National Skating Association were busy making the necessary arrangements for bring off the Championships and other races and entered into arrangement with the proprietor of the Littleport Club to hold the British Championships at that resort.

1900 04 20 c

Wicken Fen is, it is reported, about to be reclaimed. Enclosed by broad ditches which can only be jumped with the help of a pole, it is overgrown with coarse sedge and willow-bush. Rare plants and insects lurk in this natural state and makes a happy hunting-ground for the botanist and entomologist. The swallow-tail, perhaps the most beautiful of English butterflies, still lingers, though not nearly so common as formerly when it was less hunted and the food plant of its caterpillar grew almost everywhere. During the past 200 years fields have replaced the marshes. On the whole it is a change for the better, yet one space might well be preserved as a survival of the olden time

1900 05 01 c

Mr W.B. Redfarn writes: "Sir – Can I be of any service in assisting to save Wicken Fen from the proposed drainage and cultivating scheme? I have a summer residence in Waterbeach Fen and am therefore frequently in the immediate neighbourhood of this charming and interesting bit of ancient fenland. I am sure there would be a deep feeling of regret, among all classes, if this last bit of the English Fens were "reclaimed", and as the land would not be of much value

even when under cultivation, its present value cannot be very great". The absolute safety of the fen will never be assured until the whole of it has been acquired by the National Trust, or by private persons determined to save it.

1900 05 05 c

The report that Wicken Fen was about to be drained does not appear to have been well founded. The fen is held in plots by a considerable number of owners and there can be no drainage unless all the owners give their consent. The South Level Commissioners have the right to flood the fen at any time it should seem good to them to do so. Thus they can prevent the land being turned into profitable agricultural uses. The National Trust owns a strip about two acres in extent. In order that it should be permanently secured against mere commercial enterprise it must be acquired on behalf of all the public and it is clear the best thing would be that it should pass into the hands of the National Trust

1900 05 15

Messrs Gain, Moyes & Wisbey offered for sale by auction two acres of land at Wicken fen described as the only virgin fenland in England. It was valuable in consequence of the rare insects and birds and should receive the attention of any ornithologist or naturalist. The bidding reached £17.10s. at which price Mr George Verrall, president of the Entomological Society became its owner. The next lot, a similar piece in St Edmund's Fen was purchased for the Hon. Nathaniel Rothschild. The freehold licensed premises, the White Hart beerhouse, situate on heath Road, Swaffham Prior was withdrawn.

1900 11 01 c

In considering a supply of water to Littleport the Inspector said the population would require 50,000 gallons per day. The available rivers ran for a considerable length through the fens and were used as main outfall drains for the pumping engines which pumped water from the adjoining fen lands. It was obvious that any water would be subject to pollution by peaty water from the pumping stations. The waters of the Little Ouse, if taken at the end of White Hall Drove, would prove the most suitable but would still be of doubtful quality. Whatever source was chosen there should be a service reservoir near the main road to Ely

1900 11 21 c

The National Skating Association meeting heard that the Fen Centre of the Speed Departmental Committee was enabled to bring off both the Amateur and Professional Speed Skating Championships at Littleport, Mr A.E. Tebbit retaining the former, while the latter was won by Fred Ward. James Smart, who had for so long held the title, did not compete, as he has retired from the racing track.

1901 01 16 c

Mr Luddington said that people might think Littleport was a plague-infested place – (Mr Cutlack: So it is). There was nothing to prevent typhoid germs floating down the river from Ely, while the fen engines were constantly pouring in water that was impure. There was the flood time and the time when the reeds were cut and allowed to lie in the water and stink. Let them look up the river that day and ask themselves if the water was fit to drink.

1901 04 20 c

H. Rider Haggard writes: Some of the old Cambridgeshire families such as Allix, Pell, Jenyns & Frost still remain upon their ancestral acres, but the majority of them have melted away. Round Newmarket their place has been filled by an influx of millionaire owners from all parts of the globe who are interested in sport but take no real interest in the land or its occupants. The county has but few resident gentlemen, except the clergy. In the fens hardly anyone will live except those concerned in the management of the land, since here are to be found neither sport, scenery or society,

1901 08 23 c

In wet seasons fen crops are apt to go down and mildew, weeds are very prevalent and difficult to eradicate, however often the land is hoed, and potatoes, which have become such a favourite and paying crop, acquire a disagreeable taste unless eaten early, and go black in the centre. However they are all sold in London where so long as it gets a tuber that looks well the public does not in the least care about its quality.

1901 11 06 c

Newmarket RDC was told that every year £120 was collected from Swaffham Prior Fen and it was time something was done to alleviate the 100 inhabitants. Corn had to be carted by the river as a result of the bad state of the roads, which were in the worse condition possible – both summer and winter. Certain roads which have been metalled by the Fen Reeves should be taken over and maintained by the District Council.

1901 11 22 c

Mr Benstead of Swaffham Prior asked Newmarket RDC to take over parts of the road which have been metalled by the Fen Reeves. Some councillors spoke in opposition. Mr Tebbitt said there was pretty much 100 miles of such roads in Soham and he would move that Soham Fen roads be served likewise. Mr Munsey said he would do the same as regards Fordham. It was decided to refer the matter to a committee to thoroughly consider and report.

1902 02 18 c

The National Skating Association were able to bring off the British Amateur Championships at Lingay Fen. The ice at the start was in a fair condition but the sun coming out quickly affected it. In the final Albert E. Tebbitt was very quick at the start and left his opponent, F. McGuire of Boston, a long way behind. Cheered by the spectators he showed surprisingly good form, considering the state of the ice and won easily, amid considerable enthusiasm

1902 10 20 c

A Bottisham farmer was summonsed for unlawfully killing a bustard. His cowman saw a bird walking about among the cabbages and shot it. He gave it to the farmer who, not knowing what it was and whether it was good for food, took it to Mr Stanley's at Cambridge who said he thought it was a sort of turkey. It was sent to be stuffed at Mr Farren's who identified it as a great bustard, about two years old, worth about £20. The Chief Constable said a bird of this kind had been seen at Swaffham Fen and he had 30 placards with reference to its protection posted up. The man was fined £2

1902 11 06 c

Albert Pell of Wilburton Manor accused the land tax collector for the parish of Wentworth of wrongful seizure by distress of three lambs for land tax. He was the owner of about 1,000 acres in Wilburton and in 1900 had purchased two fields in Grunty Fen. He did not see how the land could be assessed for land tax in the parish of Wentworth. The defendant had come on to his land and taken away three lambs which had been sold by auction for £2 14s. But the judge found the land in question was properly comprised in the parish of Wentworth land had been taxed for over 100 years.

1903 01 03 c

Ely Rural Council's surveyor prepared a plan of the Grunty Fen road showing the proposed building at Wilburton station by the G.E.R. Company. Mr Pell said it was a one-storey building and the man was frequently complaining of the dampness of the house. It would be better if the Company would run up a second storey. It was going to be a very expensive matter to force them to remove the building. They agreed to withdrawn their opposition provided the Railway Company undertook they would not further advance their buildings to the south-west corner of the station.

1903 01 22 c

Ely court heard that an eleven year old boy was employed to ride a horse attached to a machine which was cutting beans in a field in Grunty Fen when another lad fire a gun at some rabbits. This frightened the horse and the boy was thrown upon the knives, which cut off his left arm and two fingers of his right hand. There was a considerable argument as to the wages for a boy of 11 years; he had earned 1s.6d. the day before for driving cows whilst 2s. a day was a harvest wage, and not the standard wage. Compensation was fixed at 3s. a week as long as he was incapacitated.

1903 06 04 c

Ely court heard an interesting case relating to Grunty Fen which arose out of an agreement with respect to cutting corn. James Howard had a horse and man and William Driver had a machine for cutting wheat and they came to an agreement that they would first cut Howard's crop and afterwards Driver's. Driver's son employed an 11-year-old boy to ride the foremost horse but it became restive and the poor lad was thrown and received injuries

1903 08 26 c

Ely Council considered the site for a small-pox hospital, a temporary building of wood and iron; they agreed to hire 22 acres of land in Grunty Fen, two miles from any village. A case of smallpox had occurred at Wilburton after somebody was allowed to come from a house at Cambridge where the disease existed. None of them were safe if that sort of thing could occur. Dr Anningson said there was another possible cause but did not speak in a tone that could be heard by the reporter.

1903 12 03 c

The unprecedented rainfall has taxed waterways beyond their capacity and floods are the natural consequence. In Cambridge boathouses have been invaded by the flood and the ferries have stopped plying. The flood has taken possession of Sheep's Green and part of Coe Fen while the Upper Granta has inundated many acres of pasture. In the fen country the dykes are full to overflowing and the land clogged with water, while in St Ives there are floods to a considerable depth covering hundreds of acres.

1904 02 18 c

An enquiry at Swaffham Prior into the repair of fen droves heard evidence from elderly residents that they were used by the public before the Highways Act of 1835. C.P. Allix said he remembered the droves for 50 years. All kinds of vehicles had been driven over the roads, with the exception of a motor car. But Newmarket R.D.C. said they were specified as private roads in the parish award of 1814 and had never been repaired by the ratepayers at large. There was nothing to show they had ever been used as public highways.

1904 03 31 c

The report of an enquiry into the repair of the fen droves at Swaffham Prior heard that the alleged public highway measured a little over four miles and formed a thoroughfare from near the village railway station to a ferry over the Cam in a hamlet called Swaffham Prior Fen, which has a post office, small chapel and population of 100 persons. The roads were set out as private byways by the Enclosure Award and had not been formally adopted as public highways so the question was whether between 1814 & 1835 there was uninterrupted use by the public. They took evidence from various witnesses and the RDC claimed they were repairable by drainage commissioners under an Act of 1853. They concluded there was no evidence to show the roads should be repaired by the inhabitants at large and recommended no action be taken by the County Council.

1904 04 20

Wicken Fen has been desolated by a disastrous fire, the worst of many which have played havoc with this, the only piece of primeval fen left in England. It was caused in the same way

as the others: a wax vesta, thrown away after use, did not die out and the sedge was set ablaze. Carried by the wind the fire did its deadly work. Between 30 and 40 villagers were quickly at work; after hours of hard toil they succeeded in beating out the fire with branches of trees and the conflagration was stopped at Running Water. Two gentlemen visitors who had travelled a considerable distance to search for beetles were the cause of the disaster and have offered to recompense those on whom the loss will fall but the damage to the animal life cannot be replaced.

1904 11 04

March Police Court was crowded when the man charged with attempted murder was placed in the dock. As he walked from March Station to the 'bus that was waiting to convey him to the court he chatted and laughed with the constable who had charge of him, and took no notice of the large number of the public who were curious to catch a glimpse of him. Through the windows of the 'bus pedestrians stopped to gaze at him and though there were a few unpolite remarks passed, there was no scene. Two miles out in the fen lies his victim, wife of a farmer in Coleseed Drove.

1905 01 05 c

For the last three days the thermometer has been registering eleven degrees of frost; should it hold the professional skating race open to all the world for the Littleport Fifty Guineas Challenge Cup will take place. It is imperative that skaters all over the country should receive due notice; once the amateur champion, W. Housden of Wicken Fen, did not hear and was unable to defend his title. There is already a fine sheet of ice on Lingay Fen but it is doubtful if the public will be allowed on it for a few days. Sheets of ice promise to be ready for use at Newnham shortly.

1905 07 08

'Cyclist' writes that he started on a long ride into the fen districts and distinctly remembers placing a repair outfit in his saddlebag. When in one of the most benighted parts of the fen he discovered a puncture he turned his machine in readiness to repair it. To his disgust he found his repair outfit had been abstracted from his bag. The theft is one of those paltry offences that only an excessively mean nature would cause a man to commit. 05 07 08c

1905 07 15

Mr J.A Martin of Ely said the water supply of the country was a most difficult question. In the fen district the rivers constituted the main supply and every precaution ought to be taken to keep them free from contamination. If they could utilise the water out of the rivers they would have as good a supply as they could wish. Mr Luddington of Littleport said many of the inhabitants turned to the river for their supply but the city of Ely poured crude sewage into the stream above them. 05 07 15a-d

1905 07 20

According to Dr Wilkinson Huntingdonshire has one of the highest death-rates from cancer of any county in England. He believes that cancer is more prevalent in low-lying or damp districts than elsewhere. The height of the land locally varies from a few feet only above sea level in the fen district to between 200 and 250 feet above 05 07 20d

1905 11 07

The new scheme of the Charity Commissioners relating to the Swaffham Bulbeck Poor's Fen has met with disfavour with inhabitants. Eight of them drove forty head of cattle off the Fen, which had been let by the Trustees under the new scheme. The first scheme was that the land should be laid out in allotments or garden lands but it was two miles from the village and inconvenient. There were already 114 allotments in the parish of which 20 were not let. 05 11 07b & c

1906 09 19

Burwell Poor's Fen charity details of history – 06 06 19c

1906 11 24

An inquest was held at the Knife and Steel, Pymoor, on the body of a 78-year-old woman who was found dead in a well in Suttle Fen. Her daughter found the lid off the water cistern and saw the deceased inside. The doctor said she died from shock, caused by the sudden immersion in the water. There was no sign of force 06 11 24a

1906 12 29

Christmas bathing in the river needs a Spartan spirit and a robust constitution. But in Cambridge sufficient men enjoy a jovial gathering at the Town Bathing Sheds every Christmas morning. With the mercury hovering above freezing point, water in dykes coated with ice and a keen wind blowing across the Fen, about 30 bold spirits plunged in and one swam to the Leys School. When he emerged from the water his skin had a bright red hue, but he was perfectly happy. 06 12 29b

1907 01 08

For many years a weird figure, clad in a red chintz dress, has haunted a farmhouse on the Thorney estate in the fens. During the creepy hours of the night it appeared in one particular bedroom and pointed a long, lean finger to a roof. Sometimes it made a rattling noise. Then it vanished. The house was long occupied by the Caves, a noted fen family. Now a new tenant investigating the beams above the room has found secreted there the will of John Caves, made in 1797, relating to an estate worth about £10,000. Probably the mystic lady's perambulations will now cease 07 01 08

1907 02 01

Within three miles of Witcham Gravel is another unique parish, that of Grunty Fen. It contains a population of 74, boasts of two railway stations, but has neither church, school, post office nor shop. The clergy of Stretham and Wilburton voluntarily minister to the spiritual needs as it is not within the limits of any ecclesiastical parish. 07 02 01b

1907 02 05

Littleport Skating Club's amateur race attracted 30 competitors. The ice was in good condition but a fairly heavy fall of snow necessitated the use of the snow plough to remove a coating that probably helped increase the times of some of the heats. It was won by F.W. Dix of Raunds. But a thaw means that the ice at Lingay Fen has been considerably weakened and the British Championships have had to be postponed. 07 02 05

1907 02 16

Unusual scenes were witnessed at a meeting called at Burwell to discuss the Poor Fens Charity. The schoolroom was crowded with about 400 people, many others stood outside. But Mr R. Stephenson said that as it was a parish meeting non-electors and women must leave the room. They refused. After nearly two hours the meeting was abandoned in disorder and the altercation continued in the street. 07 02 16 & a

1907 06 21

The discussions over the Poor's Fen Charity, which has excited the inhabitants of Burwell for many months and given rise to animated meetings, entered a new stage when the Charity Commissioners opened an inquiry. A large proportion of the male population, and several ladies followed the details closely for four hours as its history was traced 07 06 21

1907 08 17

Another interesting discovery of Roman remains has recently been made in Isleham fen. Some workmen engaged in digging came upon the bed of an old river where they found the impress of a boat, surrounded by the heads of cattle and some pottery. 07 08 17

1907 08 22

Ely Council heard that Burnt Fen Commissioners were about to repair the bridge on Mile-End drove and suggested it should be widened. The County Council had decided to adopt Egremont Street and Silver Street in Ely as main roads, but not Prickwillow Road because of the rolls at Prickwillow Bridge. While they remained it would never be a main road. The time had come to approach the Burnt Fen and Middle Level Commissioners to get them removed. 07 08 22

1907 10 31

Mr Payne Garnett, the art master of the Leys School, is a versatile artist who has discovered many beauty spots in Swaffham. He shows the neighbourhood of Reach and the fens during the four seasons. There is a night scene, the moonlight gently illuminating a typical piece of Fen scenery and another of a deserted village road covered with hardened snow, so full of atmosphere that you need an overcoat. 07 10 31a

1908 01 10

Hundreds of London skating enthusiasts availed themselves of train excursions to the fens which presented a practically unlimited area of ice in good conditions. Miles and miles were available. Not since 1895 have Cambridge people had such a large extent of frozen river with a splendid run from the Railway Bridge to Baitsbite Locks. Even man's modern eyesores were transformed: telegraph and telephone poles were linked with strands of silken beauty and wire-netting was outlined in crystals with the fragile delicacy of old lace. 08 01 10 f & g

1908 01 17

Ancient inhabitants rack their brains in vain for a parallel to the extraordinary weather of the past fortnight, bringing in its train a record crop of influenza. The changes from 20 degrees of frost to a damp muggy air and then back again have caused the National Skating Association to rearrange the Championships which took place at Lingay Fen in almost perfect conditions. The ice was hard and entries above average. 08 01 17b

1908 01 17

Mrs Holdich was born in Somersham 100 year ago. She remembers when each parish has its own Workhouse and her father, a farmer, ensured the poor had their Sunday dinner before he sat down to his. In the pre-vaccination days the village was half-decimated by attacks of small-pox, families dying as no one dared to enter the house to nurse them. Many suffered from fen ague and strangers who took up their abode in the village were certain to contract the complaint. 08 01 17

1908 03 27

The Long Reach public house stands on the river bank a quarter of a mile from Old Chesterton. The landlord paid no rent and was allowed five shillings a week to keep the house open. The trade was about 21 barrels of beer and 12 gallons of spirit a year. It should be closed together with the Jolly Waterman in Waterbeach Fen. It had no road leading to it and the nearby Jolly Anglers was more convenient and had a ferry attached

1908 03 27

Ouse in flood, sheep drowned Fenstanton – 08 03 27

1908 04 03

A Witcham labourer had been employed to look after the sluice doors of the Mepal catchwater drain. After he was dismissed the gates had frequently been obstructed. He was

seen deliberately dropping pieces of brick into the sluice, preventing the doors closing automatically. In the event of a high tide it might have resulted in the flooding of the Fen lands, involving very heavy damage. He was fined the enormous sum of £100 plus costs. 08 04 03a

1908 04 04

Sir – the idea of electricity generated by peat gas appeals to residents in the Fen country where peat is so plentiful. The black swamp possesses theoretical heat values not far below coal when thoroughly dried. When economically farmed, stored, dried and made fit for burning by steam boilers or ‘producer gas plants’ it becomes a formidable rival to coal with its ever-fluctuating price – James Smith 08 04 04a

1908 07 24

An inquest into the death of Stubbing Cornwell, beerhouse keeper of the Cuckoo, Lode Fen, heard he had hurt his ankle in trying to stop a cow from going out of the yard. He had been admitted to hospital and received attention but said he wanted to go home and died in bed. An inquest revealed the heart was practically worn out and he might have ‘gone off’ at any time CWN 08 07 24 p3

1908 02 18

Fenland and its treatment – agricultural situation – 08 02 18e & f

1909 05 21

Cock Inn, Isleham fen case – 09 05 21

1909 05 22

The unknown airship whose nocturnal wanderings in East Anglia have caused such a sensation is said to have been seen in Downham Fen eight days ago. Mr James Wilkin thought he heard the noise of a motor car but could not see one. His son said “Didn’t you see it! It was an airship!” Other people in the locality observed the mysterious stranger, which is said to have gone in the direction of Littleport 09 05 22

1909 06 18

The biggest incident of the May Week races was the appearance of ‘Dreadnought8’, a most ferocious affair made out of a fen barge with a chimney pot for a funnel commanded by an admiral who wielded a sixpenny sword. It managed to fire a salute though its drain pipe guns but in doing so nearly shattered its armament and all but blew its crew – in children’s sailors hats – into the water 09 06 18

1909 07 02

Heavy rains have set back the strawberry crop around Wisbech, growers have suffered severely and some of the army of casual fruit pickers who annual swarm the district have had a bad time. But newspapers reports of the countryside in a state approaching riots, with hundreds of starving and destitute pickers camping in muddy fen roads and raiding villages in order to obtain food, or of hundreds of miserable families being turned from the casual wards of the workhouses clamouring for shelter and being accommodated in the town hall are sheer nonsense. 09 07 02

1909 10 27

George ‘Fish’ Smart, the prettiest and fastest skater Britain has ever produced, has from injuries sustained in an accident at the new dock which is being constructed at Hull. He was the most famous of the three famous ‘Welney Division’ of fen skaters founded by the renowned ‘Turkey’ Smart. He started skating as a boy and beat his all-conquering cousin, George See in 1878. But he retired when beaten by his younger brother James. ‘Fish’, who was 51, had been completely lost sight of in sporting circles in recent years. CDN 09 10 27

1910 04 08

Mr C.P. Tebbutt of Bluntisham was a public speaker of exceptional gifts. He used few notes but never hesitated for a word or bungled a sentence. He spoke on the Gulf Stream, on earth worms and the drainage of the fens about which he was particularly conversant. He gave evidence to Royal Commissioners on topics including licensing saying that in Bluntisham there was one public house for every 50 persons and it was rare to see a man worse for drink. He carried out the widening of the Needingworth Road in St Ives, previously too narrow for the droves of cattle which came in from the fens ready for market. 10 04 08

1910 04 15

Two young men returning to Willingham from Haddenham on Saturday evening by the nearest route across the fens had an anxious and exciting walk. The night was intensely dark and they had difficulty keeping the proper path. With the aid of matches they managed for some time but soon the last match was struck. Then they reached a bridge over a drain. First one and then the other stepped over the side and dropped into the water. At length they struck the right track and reached home weary and wet. 10 04 15e

1910 04 08

Bargemen objected to proposed bylaws regarding lighting on barges saying they can travel more safely without them. Mr Charles Dyson of North Street Burwell said "My barges are required to carry oil, sedge, turf etc and the use of lights might prove dangerous. I have travelled on the river for 40 years and never seen any accident caused by not using lights". E.H. Godby of Littleport says he does a lot of hay and chaff work and cannot afford to have his cargo burnt while Colchester and Ball of Burwell says their boats do not travel at night and see no reason why they should show a light when stationary. Ferry boat owners also say it would be a serious expense to have to keep lights burning all night. 10 04 08 b & c

1910 05 27

The other morning I had occasion to go to Overcote Ferry. But in Middle Fen I found my way blocked by some 30 feet of sludge whilst on the footpath my progress was blocked by water and mud at the stile. I went through gaps in the hedges and got to the river only to find the footbridge had disappeared. I finally reached Overcote an hour behind time. Cannot our new District Councillor interest himself in the matter? 10 05 27d

1910 09 02

The polecat, a wild animal that was supposed to be almost extinct in England, has reappeared, after many years, in the fens. It is the habit of people to cry out against vermin, but they have their part in the scheme of things. In some parts of the country keepers were paid for every polecat destroyed. There was a favourite haunt in a small wood, almost a spinney, on the borders of Huntingdonshire and Northamptonshire. It would be interesting to know if other observers have had sight of the polecat, or indeed of other animals though to be altogether vanished from old haunts 10 09 02d

1910 09 16

Littleport girl killed in accident in Wood Fen – 10 09 16a & b

1911 02 10

There was skating on Mere Fen Swavesey. In the centre the ice was fairly good and safe but at the sides it was weak and many got their feet and legs wet. Three visitors from Cambridge afforded some amusement. Declining the services of the men with chairs they sat down on the bank after spreading out handkerchiefs to protect their clothing. They put on their skates and went boldly forward. But the thin ice near the bank gave way and one man dropped about two feet into the water. The chairmen laughed heartily and the visitors beat a hasty retreat – 11 02 10d

1911 04 21

Chatteris brigade were on their way to deal with a farm fire when they received a call to another at the premises of Messrs Price and Company in Railway Lane. It originated in store rooms where there was a large stock of matting, mats and materials used in the company's manufactures. In a very few minutes the whole premises were ablaze and the adjoining Cricketers public house surrounded by flames. There was danger of the range of dilapidated buildings in King Edward's Lane and the new schools becoming involved but with a good supply of water these were saved. 11 04 21g Also fire Upware fen

1911 05 19

George Leonard of Soham Fen was with his father carting straw. They stopped to tighten a rope and following a flash of lightning both were thrown to the ground along with their horses. Young Leonard was killed instantly. The crown of his straw hat was torn from the brim, a large piece of leather blown clean out of his right boot just above the ankle and the collar of his mackintosh had a long slit in it. The lightning also made strange markings on his back which resembled the branches of a tree. 11 05 19b

1911 07 14

The Gravel Diggers pub was right down in Cottenham fen but there was a considerable amount of labour at certain seasons. The tenant had held the licence for 30 years. It was renewed 11 07 14

1911 07 28

Littleport Show held in the grounds of Highfield House was a gratifying success. A great many were attracted by the announcement that an aeroplane flight would be attempted and they were not disappointed. The machine – one of the Bleriot type belonging to the Midland Aviation Syndicate – was wheeled to an adjacent field and the aviator made several flights. He would have continued longer but for an accident to the propeller, one of the arms having broken in the course of a descent. The machine was exhibited in a tent until five o'clock when it was wheeled out. A force of police kept the crowd under control. A large field was selected for the start. The fen men, who had never seen an aeroplane before, described it as 'like a self-binder'. There was a large cheer when the aviator took his seat and started the engine. In the first attempt the machine travelled from one end of the field to the other at a height of about 15 feet. It then headed towards Lt Downham and rose beautifully while the crowd cheered. It had travelled some hundreds of yards when the aviator, for reasons best known to himself, descended in a field of corn. In order to facilitate a start for another ascent the aeroplane was taken to a clover patch. There was a considerable delay and the majority of the crowd had returned to the show ground when the machine was seen again to rise to 50 feet but then the aviator planed down to earth again. It did not descend so well as on previous occasions and it was reported that an accident had happened. A proportion of the propeller had broken off. This put an end to the flying and the crowd dispersed, satisfied that a flight had really been made 11 07 28c

1912 04 05

Mr G. Carmichael was appointed resident engineer by the Middle Level Commissioners in 1863 following the flooding at St Germans. He became superintendent of the South Level, then Bedford Level Corporation, Padnal and Waterden and Roswell Pits Commissioners. In 1891 he was also appointed superintendent of the Ouse Outfall Board and Caudle Fen Commissioners, in 1900 of the Middle Fen and in 1909 the Norfolk Estuary Commissioners. After retirement he was elected to the Ely Urban District Council and any advice he gave on drainage matters was treated with importance. 12 04 05d

1912 08 30

Littleport suffered badly in the heavy and continuous rain. The rushing water from the Hemp field flooded the main street between the Granby Hotel and Hitches Street, running into the shops of Mr Fitch and Mr Secker. The steam fire engine made some attempt to pump the water away, but was not very successful. At Haddenham the inhabitants were aroused by the 'Town Crier', Mr Pope, who called upon every man to go down to the Cut Bank or the fen would be 'drowned'. After toiling for hours with railway sleepers the danger was averted. But the crops were partly submerged and the water entered farm cottages forcing several families to beat a retreat 12 08 30n

1912 08 30

The Mile Bank at Littleport has been flooded as never before since the draining of the fens has been carried out by machinery. When the Fen engines need overhauling the work is invariably carried out in the summer when, under normal circumstances, their services are not required. It is a slice of bad luck that it is undergoing repair just when it is wanted and hence water is remaining on thousands of acres. The Commissioners are taking steps to substitute another kind of engine. Meanwhile harvest operations are out of the question except where the labourers are working in top-boots 12 08 30o

1912 08 30

Floods Swavesey, Cottenham, Royston, Melbourn, Arrington, Histon, St Ives – 12 08 30h

1912 10 11

The fen mustard crop was sown in favourable circumstances but the dry spring was not right for the plant and later there was little sunshine. It ripened before it had fully matured but most was harvested before the heavy rains came. The yield was not so good as had been hoped for. Amongst buyers at the Wisbech mustard market was Sir Jeremiah Colman when the price for brown seed was the same as last year. However very little white seed was on offer 12 10 11d

1912 11 01

The County Council discussed the establishment of a farm institute to specialise in fenland farming, fruit-growing, poultry and bee-keeping. Coun. Wootton said he'd started life as a small holder 55 years ago and it was nothing more or less than hard work from morning till night. 'Agricultural Amateurs' were always trying experiments to do away with hard work. But you could not succeed in farming unless you worked jolly hard. There was a great demand for experts and advisers – men who were discovering what farmers had found out 50 years before. The idea was rejected. 12 11 01j

1912 11 15

Occupiers of low-lying land in Swavesey will be glad to learn that important steps have been taken to lessen the damage caused by floods at the Swan Pond and High Street. Doors will be erected at Over Bridge to stop the Bedford water from flowing into Cow Fen. The six cottages at Turn Bridge, the occupants of which have to flit on the occasion of a high flood, will no longer be in danger of inundation. But four cottages at Church End and another at Ramper Road have been condemned as insanitary although there is no other housing available and so the disturbed residents will be offered the hospitality of the workhouse 12 11 15f

1912 11 22

Pumps of the new engine installed at Ten Mile Bank by Littleport and Downham Commissioners were started for the first time. It was 1819 when they erected their first engine here, it was of 30 hp driving a water wheel. This was replaced by an 80 hp engine in 1840 with new boilers in 1878 and bigger scoop wheels two years later. The drainage of the future would be more difficult owing to the land settling in some places and several drains would have to be diverted to avoid the hills. 12 11 22

1912 12 12

A few years ago a farmer in Burnt Fen objected to paying the education portion of the poor rate and bought a new wagon to hand over for the purpose of distraint. It was painted red and he intended to have a record of each distraint recorded on a panel in black lettering, buying it back himself. He was convinced that by the time all the panels were filled in, he would be no longer called upon to pay the rate 12 12 12c

1912 12 27

Robert Farren, the well-known Cambridge artist, died at Highgate. Farren, who was born in Cambridge about 80 years ago, lived in Cambridge all his life with the exception of a few years' residence at Scarborough until August last when he went to live in Highgate. He was a very clever water colour artist but best known for his work in oils and his etchings. His fen pictures were well-known and his series of etchings of cathedral cities amongst his most famous work. He also produced fine etchings of the Cambridge Greek plays. His 'Degree Day' was published as a photo by Wm Farren when he lived in Rose Crescent. Farren loved to paint Cambridge & Cambridgeshire scenery and there is scarcely a picturesque 'bit' in the town or county that has not been reproduced by him. At one time he had his studios at the top of which are now the University offices but were formerly a Liberal Club. A good many years ago he resided at Mayfield, Hills Road but during the last three years lived at no.1 Station Road. In his younger days he was a very handsome figure, tall and well-built. He was a skilful fencer and attained some note as a geologist. He married Miss Mason, a Cambridge lady and had a family of 14 children, none of whom are now living in Cambridge, his only relatives being his nephew William Farren, the naturalist, of Regent Street and his brother. Two of his daughters have inherited their father's artistic skill in no small degree. The funeral will take place at Old Chesterton churchyard where his wife is buried. – 12 12 20bb Robert Farren's funeral at Old Chesterton. Three children of his eldest son, the late Ernest Farren live with their mother in Herbert Street 12 12 27b

1913 01 17

Sedge Fen presentation 13 01 17 p10 CIP

1913 01 31

The coroner reported he had already held three inquests occasioned by persons being killed by trains at the Mile End, Prickwillow crossing. The present mode of ringing of the bell on the gatekeeper's cottage as trains pass Shippea Hill station should continue and a red wooden arm, as on signals, should work automatically with the bell and be placed where it can be plainly seen by persons using the crossing. A similar system should apply when trains pass Ely northern signal-box – 1301 31 p11 CIP

1913 07 02

Not within living memory have the famous Wicken Fens been so completely flooded as they are at present. The district presents an appearance reminiscent of the Broads, for as far as the eye can see in many directions only the top rails of the fens and the hedgerow tops are visible. It is feared that much damage has been done in this "entomologist's paradise" 13 07 02 p11

1913 03 24

A fierce fire occurred at North Fen Farm, Waterbeach, deep in the fen. The alarm was given by members of the Stretham Fen platelayers' gang who carried bucket after bucket of water from the wide drains. The battle seemed hopeless. The tar on the nearest side of the shed was melted and streamed down the sides. It was burnt out with its contents, including a self-binder, grass mower, horse hoe and three bags of artificial manure. Waterbeach fire brigade got within a mile of the scene but were told the fire had been extinguished and turned back. 13 03 24 p5 CIP

1913 05 30

Ebenezer Driver, an Isleham gravel and shingle merchant told the court he owned 16 lighters and a steam tug. He'd delivered eleven lighter loads of sand and gravel to Southery for the Methwold & Feltwell Drainage Board to use as concrete at the pumping station. Heber Martin, surveyor of Littleport said he'd measured the barges and worked out the amount supplied. Joseph Whitehead said he'd carted it from the lighters. But the Board disputed the quantity. The suggestion that being fenland it had acted as a quick-sand and swallowed up the materials could not be accepted since the ground was so hard people could not get a pick into it. It was possible more sand and gravel had been used in making the concrete than they'd allowed for. 13 05 30 p8 CIP

1913 07 04

Cottenham drainage commissioners report that a large amount of coal has been consumed due to the heavy rains and floods. The driver of the Smithy Fen engine had about 60 tons of coal in stock and the engine needed repairing. Some drains were in poor condition: on one occasion while water was lowered two feet nine inches in the drain at the engine it was only reduced three inches at Half Moon Bridge. Both engines should be repaired 13 07 04 p12 CIP

1913 05 16

Three Soham men observed an animal lying on some sticks upon the top of a hedge in House Fen Drove. It showed quite a fighting disposition on being disturbed and almost caught one of them with its teeth and claws. It was eventually killed with sticks and stones. On examination it proved to be a fine specimen of the American racoon, weighing 8lbs. It was the size of a fox and had a pretty ringed, bushy tail. It is thought to have escaped from a passing menagerie 13 05 16 p11 CIP

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1913 10 03

Following the destruction by fire of the Burwell Lode pumping engine at Upware in January the old engine was overhauled. It was restarted after six weeks and the pump kept going meanwhile by two heavy traction engines. But it was not quite strong enough to work the huge pump and in times of heavier floods difficulty had been experienced in coping with the water. Now a new one made by Ruston and Proctor of Lincoln has been delivered to Upware by road. Considerable difficulty was met with installing it as the station has not yet been rebuilt from the fire. The engine is much smaller so the walls have been lowered and a temporary roof erected. It worked very smoothly although the pump had been standing for over three months it raised the water in half the ordinary time 13 10 03 p11 CIP

1914 01 02

Ice Grip.—The one topic of conversation in Cambridge last evening which absorbed all others was the weather. For the past two or three days Fenland has been in the grip of the ice, and the prospects of good skating until the afternoon were indeed rosy, but with the announcement that the dates had been fixed for deciding some of the championships on Lingay Fen, a thaw set in, and now the question was, would this continue or would further degrees of frost be registered? There was some, skating in Cambridge yesterday,

1914 01 16

There has been an eternal struggle in the fens between drainage and navigation: the Highlander wants to get his flood water off rapidly and by so doing floods the Lowlander out. The navigator wants deep channels and in making them withdraws the natural support for the banks which slip and silt up his deeper water again. Parish awards make elaborate provision for maintaining ditches but the County Council has no powers to maintain natural rivers free from obstruction and the issue of underground water rights is difficult. Now an inquiry called after the disastrous flood of August 1912 has started taking evidence from various bodies. 14 01 16c, d & I

1914 05 15

A disastrous fire occurred at Stephen Parson's farm in Horselode Fen, Chatteris. A straw stack was struck by lightning and in a short time the stackyard was in flames. The Fire Brigade was hampered by the scarcity of water on these fen farms. Two of three buildings were destroyed. Great praise is due to the men on the farm who moved twelve fat beasts and some valuable horses into a grass field. & worked hard to save the most substantial buildings 14 05 15b

1914 06 19

The caravan of the Women's Health Association visited Lt Ouse where an address with cinematograph pictures was given by Miss Faithful Davis in a hall at the White House Farm, kindly lent by Mrs Luddington. Next morning she gave two lectures to children at the Little Ouse and Feltwell Fen schools. All the lectures were well attended 14 06 19 p11

1914 11 27

New machinery installed at the Hundred Foot pumping station just beyond Pymore was formally opened. The new plant supplied by Gwynnes cost £3,000 with another £1,100 for work on the engine house. It is a high-pressure compound engine and a vast improvement on the old engine and scoop wheel. The fens had subsided and got so low for the old scoop wheel and it became impossible to grow potatoes. Decision hastened by the great flood of 1912 when water rose to the bands of the wheat shocks, potatoes and onions completely covered. . Had been pumping plant since 1829. In 1881 the scoopwheel was enlarged. Now had two good sets of pumping machinery, one at Ten Mile Bank 14 11 27

1915 01 09

Fen floods approaching those of 1897; fen engines are going at high pressure and the tall smoking chimneys attest the efforts of man to save the fenland as much as possible. Ten Mile Bank engine, erected 1913, is doing splendid work as is the new machinery installed two months ago. In Ely Cutter Inn wavelets approach entrance and on other side of river an old cottage cut off... Two cottages near the railway bridge are flooded, orchards in Willow Walk, the sewage tank and rod-peeling sheds are all surrounded. At Prickwillow crack appeared in part of the bank, gaulters despatched to give an extra layer of gault. Feltwell bank broke flooding area. Barges unable to pass under Littleport bridge and all vehicles, horses and cattle were ferried. In construction new bridge the road was made up on either side. In 1897 water invaded the lower portions of Victoria Street ... Prior to building of the new Ely High Bridge flood water usually flowed over the Stuntney Road Waterside Quay flooded some days and people in Babylon can take boat almost to their doors. Joseph Martin relates 1796 flood as recorded by grandfather – bank gave way and water came to within 100 feet of main street of Littleport; also 1852 when sheep drowned in Southery Fen 15 01 09

1915 01 29

West Norfolk fenland floods are developing alarmingly. Under the pressure of the high tides the new protective dam at Hockwold breach has collapsed and the water is running over Southery Fen in great volume than ever. Several cottages have collapsed. Residents who

escaped with their bedding in boats passed the night in Southery Schools. A number of houses in Southery village also became flooded. Floating furniture is being salvaged by boats and the main London road is impassable 15 01 29

1915 02 05

Floods ... water still rushing through bank of Lt Ouse near Hockwold ... water now 9ft deep. Several of the older or less substantial cottages have now collapsed and others are expected to fall. The furniture in St Peter's Mission Church in Methwold is floating about in the building. The Little Ouse burst its banks on Jan 3rd and although £2,000 has been spent on the work of closing the gap the flooding has not yet been stopped 15 02 05

1915 02 19

The floods are still rising in Southery Fen where a number of men set off in a boat to salvage furniture from a submerged house some distance from the main road. The gale increased in violence and the occupants of the craft became alarmed. They managed to steer the boat to a hayrick, the top of which remained dry. On getting alongside they climbed to the rick and there spent the night, exposed to the fury of the gale and suffered severely from the cold. As they did not return relatives became alarmed. At daybreak the men were seen clinging to the hayrick and no time was lost in rescuing them. Through the bursting of another bank, a further three thousands acres have been added to the flooded area 15 02 19

1915 04 30

Norfolk floods, Southery area cover 20 square miles; nothing to see but devastation, tons of potatoes in a sea of water. Many smallholders face ruin. When return home after some months have to procure new furniture. Relief fund formed 15 04 30 p3

1915 05 07

Norfolk flood relief fund set up Ely – farmers had suffered badly ... never seen such desolation ... 266 families affected 15 05 07 p2

1915 07 09

Cottenham fen drainage commissioners' new engine for Smithy Fen to be bought 15 07 09 p6

1915 07 23

Southery floods – repairs of Lynn to Ely road; no money to strengthen banks 15 07 23 p3

1915 07 30

Danger of floods – if bank had not burst and flooded Methwold Fen it would have given way higher up 15 07 30 p4 & p7

1915 12 02

Ouse Drainage new authority for navigation, taxation and administration and for better drainage and embankment – were too many sections and needed a larger authority with wider powers; banks of Ten Mile River of insufficient width; powers of South Level Commissioners limited; perhaps a relief channel from Littleport Bridge to Hundred Foot 15 12 02 p8 CIP

1916 05 10

Southery flooded and 20,000 acres submerged – photos – 16 05 10b

1916 06 21

New Ruston drainage pump at Cottenham – photo feature – 16 06 21b

1917 07 11

Fen drainage and the Ouse outfall – to consider report by A.H. Case but not refer to one by E.G. Crocker; urgent need of improvement, should be new body to deal with river above Denver – 17 07 11a, 17 07 18b

1918 03 06

Fen drainage and Ouse outfall – Crocker disagrees with Case report – 18 03 06a

1918 04 24

A great flood, higher level than has been recorded since the great storm of August 3, 1879 Miles of country were under water on Wednesday; roads and paths were rendered impassable to foot passengers, the ferries at Cambridge were stopped, low-lying houses and premises near the river were flooded and the water was up to the permanent way of the railway between Chesterton and Waterbeach. The river has shown more frequent tendencies to flood of late years than, formerly - one cause is said to be the clearing-out of ditches and water courses by War Agricultural Committees 18 04 24 CIPof

1919 02 12

Fen drainage; report of Sidney Preston on merits of rival schemes; condemns Case's scheme of training walls seawards and points out inefficiency of number of drainage authorities each working alone. Problem is a national one; suggests put Ten Mile and Hundred Foot rivers in good condition, repair banks at outfall, dredge Eau Brink and Marsh Cuts, shut out tides by locks – 19 02 12a

1919 02 26

Serious Floods.—Not for many years has the County of Cambridge been visited by floods of such magnitude or of so serious a nature as those experienced within the last ten days. Thousands of acres are under water, and at Cambridge the water rose at one time to within six inches of the height reached by the memorable flood of 1879. At Ely the river touched a depth beyond any previously attained within the memory of the oldest inhabitants. It is good news to hear that since Sunday the water has been steadily falling. A serious break in the river bank midway between Waterbeach and Upware last Wednesday resulted in the disastrous flooding of hundreds of acres of low-lying land in the vicinity, the temporary isolation of several farms and cottages and considerable damage to stacks. On Tuesday night ... above the banks at Waterbeach Fen where the break in the river bank occurred, and farmers took prompt steps to remove their stock to safety, but on Wednesday morning a break occurred, and the breach rapidly becoming wider, the water poured through. Farm buildings and cottages were surrounded, and the inhabitants in some cases were forced to seek shelter in the village. All Wednesday farm workers and other helpers from Waterbeach and district worked up to their knees in water, but the gap widened, and it was found necessary to sink two barges in the breach. Thousands of sandbags were requisitioned and by this means the hole was filled and the inflow of water at this spot checked. Men have been employed night and day in "cradging" along the banks and strengthening the places where any water was found overflowing, this also being done on the Stretham bank of the Old West 19 02 26 CIPof

1919 03 12

5,000 Acres Under Water. — In consequence of three serious breaks in the banks caused by the recent floods, it is estimated that about 5,000 acres of farm land, including some smallholdings, are still under water to a depth of from 2 ft. to 5.ft. in Cambridgeshire. In places the water stretches as far as the eye can see, cottages, farm buildings, stacks and just the top rails of gates showing out of the water. The breaks which occurred in the banks holding back the water resulted in large areas, hitherto regarded as safe from the inroads of flood water, becoming inundated. The damage has been most extensive and in some cases tons of produce, particularly potato crops, have been rendered almost valueless. The places where the banks gave way were (1) at Barway, on the Soham Lode, (2) at Waterbeach Fen, on the river Cant, (3) at Stretham and Thetford Fen, on the Old West River. The worst break was

probably at Barway, where the bank apparently gave way from underneath, after being undermined by the water. Huge portions of the bank were torn away by the rush of water and can be seen now dotted about in the floods like little islands 19 03 12 CIPof

1919 03 19

Problem of the Ouse Valley and impact of recent floods; detailed report – 19 03 19a

1919 05 14

Prevention of floods; drainage of basin of Gt Ouse; scheme proposed by Board of Agriculture; propose form single Drainage Board – 19 05 14e

1919 02 26

Serious floods, river bank gives way between Waterbeach and Upware, worst in living memory, men cradging on Stretham bank and Old West. One cause is clearing of streams above Cambridge last summer and accumulation in the river-beds below. Dredging scheme needed; photos – 19 02 26a & b

1919 08 20

Improving land drainage; Board of Agriculture is about to lose the German prisoner labour used to good effect on agricultural drainage. Was lent to the Board free of cost and cannot be replaced. Work will be carried on by the local drainage authorities with rating powers. They worked in districts where there were no drainage authorities. Worked on Upper Ouse and tributaries, on Anglesey marshes, Blackwater and other Essex rivers. More will have to be done with machinery of Canadian type. River Ouse is badly shoaled and sections between Denver Sluice and Brandon Creek extremely congested. Preliminary had labour well in hand and three dredgers will soon be working. New Ouse Drainage Board will continue work – 19 08 20c

1919 10 08

Drainage of the fens; Board of Agriculture & River Ouse order for single drainage authority drafted – 19 10 08a

1919 10 29

Drainage of fens – enquiry into proposed scheme and formation of one drainage board – 19 10 22f; conclusion – 19 10 29c

1920 01 07

Bottisham & Swaffham Drainage, commissioners' financial difficulties; £10,000 flood damage last year; interesting inquiry; former owner of Anglesey Abbey had made arrangements to divert certain water which passed in front of his house ... Swaffham drainage system the most expensive ... in 1853 the fen people promised the high land people they could conduct the water along the Lodes instead of allowing it to run into the Fen- Ch 20 01 07

1920 02 07

Fens Light Railway inquiry; Shippea Hill and over Lt Ouse, Southery & Keeble's Railway – would be for fruit; would need separate siding Shippea Hill; commissioners say it unsafe to have railway traffic supported on river banks

1920 04 14

Washes flooded between Upware & Ely, drainage engines in Burwell fen working at full pressure, men patrolling in thigh boots

1920 06 03

Pritchard Rayner estate sold at Ely – 72 lots including Adelaide farm, baker's shop in St Mary's Street, land Cawdle Fen, Padnal, West Fen, Waterloo House, Grunty Fen

1920 11 03

Criticism of dredging in Ouse between Denver & Wissey; dredgers totally unsuitable; had sunk, drew stuff to wrong side of river – Ch 20 11 03

Fens roads dispute Soham & Isleham Bank Drove – not a public highway – 21 06 15c

1924 01 17 c

Isle of Ely County Council are prepared to declare the road from Ely to Prickwillow and thence to Mile End drove and Mildenhall road a main road, subject to certain improvements including the abolition of the tolls collected at Prickwillow by the Burnt Fen and Middle Fen commissioners. The tolls being discontinued it was resolved that the toll gates at Prickwillow be taken by the Superintendent and notices as to the collection of tolls be removed from the toll house.

1924 02 01 c

Frederick Hiam told the Ouse drainage board that a number of banks were in bad order. In Burnt Fen there were several places in the banks leaking badly. In the old days two gangs of lighters were at work, but since the board had taken the matter over nothing had been done. Who was responsible if there was a break? If we had another inch of rain we should have had the fens flooded. If there was 20 feet in of water in the river there was not a bank safe. They would soon be a million pounds in debt, if they had to pay compensation for damage done.

1924 02 23 c

At a meeting at St Ives to discuss the Ouse Drainage order Mr Wheeler said there was a vast difference in draining lands below sea level and those above. The test was a simple one. If you took all the fens works away, the fens would suffer, but St Ives would not; therefore the work was for the benefit of the fen land. But the scheme proposed that the uplands should first of all pay for works done in their own district, and in additional pay towards all the works done in the fens whose works were obstructing the flow of our water out to the sea

1924 08 05 c

The West Cambs Fruit Growers' Association inspected Mr Robert Stephenson's new cold storage premises and fruit plantations at Burwell Little Fen. It is divided into four cold chambers, a packing shed and engine room. A large Cutler grader is to be installed. The engine and plant for cooling include a big Blackstone oil engine and Petter oil engine. The stores will accommodate about 600 tons of fruit

1925 01 19

The third and final distress sale ordered by the Ouse Drainage Board took place. 25 lots including crops, gold watches, bean drill, milk cooler and other articles were offered for sale but they were all withdrawn, as the bids did not go beyond one shilling. The first lot to be offered was a sporting gun. After the crowd had sung "Rule Britannia" a shilling was bid. The lot was withdrawn. The next lot met a similar fate. The crowd then gave a pathetic and heart-stirring rendition of "Shall we gather at the river". After this the proceedings were enlivened by a series of solos played by the happy possessor of a tin trumpet. A silver biscuit barrel was next. Instead of bidding the crowd sang(?) "To be a farmer's boy" and "John Brown's body" followed by "Tipperary". When the auctioneer called for "three cheers" for the Ouse Drainage Board the response was "three boos c25 01 19

1925 05 18

The Ouse drainage question is still a burning topic in Soham. Two bailiffs visited a farm at Soham fen to demand rates amounting to £29. Apparently the money was not forthcoming for one of the bailiffs went over to a barn and taking down a halter which was hanging just over the top of a mangold cutter said, "I seize this". A tall, well-built young lady of 16 also seized hold of the halter, and a struggle ensued during which she struck her arm against the mangold

cutter, bruising it. Another young lady then came on the scene and struck the bailiff on the nose, causing blood to flow. Farmers think the Ouse Drainage Board was forced on them by the Government and that Soham is being asked to pay for works which benefit other towns who were not asked to contribute.

1925 06 29

A somewhat alarming rumour as to four men engaged in harvest work in West Fen, Ely, having been poisoned after drinking beer, has gained ground in the last day or two. It appears they were working in a field and had stopped for refreshments. Each drank some beer from a bottle, which evidently had previously contained paraffin oil. Afterwards the men complained of pains in the stomach. Three recovered sufficiently from the attack to proceed with their work but the fourth was not so fortunate and medical attention had to be obtained.

1925 12 12

Lively scenes took place at an intended auction sale of goods distrained on the instructions of the Ouse Drainage Board for non-payment of the rate. Some 30 men attended the sale at Scales' Hotel, Milton Road, Cambridge. As soon as the auctioneer opened the sale there was loud cheering, followed by a continued hubbub. Accordions were played more or less melodiously, the shriek of penny whistles rent the air, and mouth organs and toy trumpets added to the general pandemonium. A Welsh pony was trotted out from the stable, its back covered with a large Union Jack and was run to and fro to the sounds of much music amid a constant flow of racing terms. It was also sternly admonished to 'keep its tail up' and was confidently dubbed next year's Derby winner. No bids were forthcoming c25 12 12

1926 01 12

Ely and low-lying parts have luckily escaped any serious encroachment from the flood waters passing down the River Ouse. On Monday the river reached its highest at 16 ft 9 ins, the normal being 13 ft 6 ins. Denver sluice was a godsend, for had it not been for the fine manipulation of those sluices another two to three feet would have been recorded at Ely. Along the 100 ft Bank however and between the Old and New Bedfords, the flood water stretches for at least 20 miles. Many parts around have suffered, but no serious damage is reported c26 01 12

1926 01 18

There were lively scenes in East Road, Cambridge, when another "sale" of goods distrained by the Ouse Drainage Board for the non-payment of rates was to have taken place. A "jazz band" quickly attracted a crowd to the scene and the sight of 30 men attired in top hats, paper hats etc, caused considerable amusement. Some had toy trumpets, some hunting horns, some penny whistles while a few motor hooters added to the "harmony". Attempts to conduct the sale were drowned in a general uproar and all the lots were withdrawn c26 01 18

1926 07 04

Lively scenes were witnessed when Cambridge was "invaded" by visitors from Soham who came to protest against the sale of goods distrained by the Ouse Drainage Board from Barcham Farm for the non-payment of rates. No one could mistake their "leader", Mr A.E. Elsdon, who was attired in "cap and gown" and wore a large buttonhole of sweet Williams, supplemented by a rhubarb leaf. Another wore a slightly battered "topper" and enthusiastic supporters had rattles, concertinas and "screechers". A blind man in charge of a street organ had been hired and did his work thoroughly c26 07 04

1926 07 19

One of the greatest enterprises of the age in the fen district in draining 16,000 acres of land has been accomplished by the Burnt Fen Commissioners with the formal opening of the new oil power plant at the Lark Pumping Station at Prickwillow. The Blackstone engine connected

to a Gwynne centrifugal pump will cost £400 a year to run, a saving of £1,000 over the old steam plant c26 07 19

1926 07 20 c

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1926 09 10

St Ives Council River Committee reported that a cross head had given way at the Staunch, wrecking one of the gates and causing a fall in the river; repairs had been carried out. They communicated with Mr Simpson, the owner who replied: "There seems to be some misunderstanding. Your council rent the staunch which comprises the lock and pen. In times gone by the lock had only one pair of gates (the second being put in when the navigation was restored about 1850). The barges came up the river and made fast just above the pen and flood gates; the gates of the pen were then shut and the flood gates lowered, and when sufficient water had come down the boats proceeded to the next lock. Would the council care to buy the whole structure? They would then not have to spend money on other people's property" 26 09 10

1926 09 16c

Ely Councillors discussed government regulations requiring every cowkeeper or purveyor of milk to be registered and all who keep cows must have cement floors. It means that the cows kept on fen farms, to employ labour, would have to be sold. A man would not be able to keep his own cow in his own yard or sell his own milk. It appeared a lot of tomfoolery and was helping the foreigner instead of those at home. It was agreed to protest against the order.

1926 12 31

The Great Ouse River Board heard that a number of stages had been erected on the banks of the Ten Mile River and the Wissey for loading sugar beet. The banks in many cases had been cut. Furthermore in loading the beet on to barges a quantity of earth was allowed to fall into the river. It should be made clear this should not be done without the approval of the Board. Sir Fred Hiam proposed notices be printed so the factories could send one to each farmer who contracted with them to supply beet. 26 12 31

1927 10 11 c

A fire broke out in the stackyard at Further Farm, Stretham fen and eight were totally destroyed. Considerable difficulty was experienced in getting the fire engine to the farm owing to the condition of the drove, but with the help of three horses from the farm this was accomplished. Mr F. Oakey drove from Ely in his motor and arrived before the firemen. He dashed into the flames and drove out a practically red hot tractor from between the blazing stacks into a place of safety. Luckily a good supply of water was available from the dykes which had been filled by opening the dam at Morton's Farm.

1927 10 30 c

The Chief officer of Ely Fire Brigade reported on the fire in Stretham fen. It was in a most inaccessible place and they had difficulty in getting there. The lorry lamps were absolutely useless; any new lorry should have an electric lamp. Mr Harvey asked if the firemen got extra for the night hours. They put in a lot of time and the insurance people must be obliged to them for saving what they did. He thought they were not paid much for it. If there had been any farm hands to help they would have been away seven or eight hours earlier.

1927 11 11 c

The County Council considered possible legislation to facilitate the conversion into hard metalled roads of fen droves, green lanes or similar roads which by reason of insufficient hard material were not fit to carry traffic at all seasons of the year, including private roads, occupation roads and roads set aside under Enclosure & Drainage Awards. At present it was nobody's duty to look after such roads and what little work was done to them was largely wasted. If the Government was going to do anything to encourage agriculture it could not do better than to improve these roads.

1927 11 12

The Ouse Drainage Bill was rejected by a Joint Committee of Parliament. It was proposed to construct training walls, embankments, sluices and deepening channels and rate – differentially as between uplands and lowlands – the whole of the watershed from Oxford to the Wash. It was the adequacy of even this elaborate scheme and the apportionment of the cost which provoked strong opposition. Experts reported that if the proposals were not carried out “the danger of the district returning to its original condition of swamp is very real”. c27 11 12

1927 11 21 c

Syd Greenall, the famous fen skater and professional champion of 1901, has died of double pneumonia. He was born in Cambridgeshire 42 years ago. At Belle Vue Kennels, Manchester, last summer, he was bitten by a dog and said, “This will kill me”. Greenall was not only one of the world's fastest skaters, but was also a fine figure skater.

1927 11 24 c

The awkward position of the members of the Ouse Drainage Board on account of the rejection of the Drainage Bill led to lengthy discussions. The uplander, the fenlander and the lowlander were opposed to that Bill, the forces against it must have been tremendous and the rejection was a surprise to the Government officials who drafted it. They hoped that the new Bill that came forward would be from the fen people themselves, the trouble with the last one was that it came too much from above

1928 01 16c

A break 35 yards long in the bank of the Little Ouse river, two miles below Wilton Bridge near Lakenheath, occurred shortly after midnight. The Ouse Drainage Board engineers are on the spot with boats laden with gault and a gang of men are working hard to stop the leak. The floods are still rising in the Fen district. The situation is serious but no further breaks are reported. The banks are being carefully watched and weak spots have been strengthened and it is hoped they will hold out.

1928 01 24

Reports from the flooded areas in the Fens show that the water is gradually subsiding. The position at the break in the bank of the River Wissey at Hilgay was unchanged. Water was still pouring through the gap and no attempt could be made at present to stop it. The arrival by rail of 10,000 more sandbags is being awaited. Men are in readiness to begin work on filling the gap as soon as the water level admits. At present the rush of water is too great.

1928 01 28

The Ouse Drainage Board discussed the breach of the bank of the River Wissey. It was said the cause was the action of the sluice-keeper at Denver in not opening the new eye during the floods. But the reason it had not worked was that the frost was so severe; the sluice was pulled up and great difficulty was experienced in getting it down as the grooves were covered with ice. When the thaw set in the door was eased and had worked splendidly every since. The floods were caused by the large flow of water down the Cam and the other three rivers into the Ten Mile. It was the highest flood ever recorded at Denver Sluice, three inches higher than in February 1919 c28 01 28

1928 05 05

The Ouse Drainage Board heard that great damage was done to the banks of the rivers during the January floods and some £15,000 will be necessary to put them in the state they were previously. The Ministry should be induced to make some contribution to the cost. The flood, which was accompanied by a strong gale, damaged 47 miles of the banks of the main rivers and 16 miles of the smaller rivers and lodes. Mr Tebbutt said that during his knowledge of the river for 50 years only on three occasions did he remember as much flooding as on the last occasion. It was exceptional c28 05 05

1928 05 27 c

A Cottenham farmer said that heavy post-war losses in connection with heavy stallions were the chief cause of his failure. He had started about 30 years ago at Mitchell Fen near Twenty Pence Ferry. During the war his farming operations were successful and he bought four shire stallions. But after the war horses went down slump, the country was flooded with horses from abroad and farmers would not breed horses. So he had his stallions on his hands and sold them; the four together for which he had paid over £350 did not make more than 80 guineas.

1928 07 11 c

The Clerk of Swavesey District Council read an anonymous letter expressing surprise that Swavesey was more highly rated than any other parish in the district. The Chairman said that it was a very expensive parish and if ratepayers were not satisfied with the efforts of the Council to keep the place in a sanitary condition they would have to get a qualified man able to drain the fens and who would be an additional expense. The statements were misleading and Council should take no notice of what they saw in the papers. If every little thing going on was reported they had better say nothing.

1928 09 29 c

The most disastrous fire seen in the fens for some years originated in West Fen Farm, Ely. Owing to the bad state of the road the Brigade experience considerably difficulty in getting close to the fire. The flames were twenty feet high and showers of sparks floated about in all directions. In the midst of the blazing yard was a valuable drum and elevator which was practically reduced to scrap iron. The glow of the fire was noticed for miles around and many people who saw it motored or cycled to the isolated scene.

1928 10 10

The chairman of the Ouse Drainage Board came in for some heckling at a meeting at Cottenham. After the disaster in Southery Fen in 1915 and 1916 the work of the Board had saved the entire South Level from being flooded last winter. But Mr Wright-Graves said the value of the land had been brought down from £25 to £10 an acre. The tax was more than the occupiers could bear and it would be better to have a flood once in seven years. c28 10 10

1928 10 13 c

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1928 12 31

The Ouse Drainage Board heard the mud and refuse from Ely Sugar Beet Factory was clogging up the river so that even tugs could not get through even with no boats in tow, except on a channel ploughed day after day. The water was being held up towards Cambridge and there was serious danger of flooding. It was a waste of money to have dredgers in the Ten

Mile River getting the mud out when it was being put in faster by the Beet Factory. Thousands of tons of mud were going into the river and it was a scandalous affair. The whole of the river between Ely and Denver Sluice had a thin coating of slime all over it and was the consistency of a mud-pie. It will not be the Ouse Drainage Board much longer if this goes on: it will be the Ouse Drowning Board. c28 12 31

1929 02 01 c

A story of how a large family had been living in a tent of sacks and sticks was unfolded at Cambridge court. The man had not done any work for eight years and the woman provided for her family by hawking. They lived by wandering about the fen district camping out, and the only time the children had proper covering was when they were in poor law institutions. They had in a tent in Cuckoo Lane, Cottenham; it could not be called waterproof, on the floor was a small portion of straw and there was a foul smell

1929 02 23

C.W. Horn did not, as he had hoped, beat the professional time for the three-miles' circular skating course at Lingay Fen. The ice, though hard underneath, was distinctly soft on top and it gave the officials some anxiety owing to the large number of people who insisted on clustering round the finish. The crowd numbered several hundred. The closest heat was between G.E. Martin and F. Bebas from Spalding, there being only two-and-a-half seconds between them

1929 03 26

An inquiry was held into proposals by the Ouse Drainage Board to carry out work at Welmore Lake Sluice. The Ministry had agreed to fund one half of the cost of £30,000 but local ratepayers objected saying it was unfair to expect them to pay so large a sum when the work would benefit many others. The sluice had been constructed about 1825 and benefited the Middle Level as it prevented the tide coming up against their barrier banks. Methwold and Feltwell Drainage Board protested against payment for a sluice which would confer not one penny benefit on them. They were being asked to 'hold the baby' and it was rather too lusty an infant for them to hold. If the cost were spread more fairly it would only amount to an 8d rate and no one would feel the pinch. 29 03 26

1929 08 16

Wicken Fen sedge fire – CDN 16.8.1929

1930 01 13 c

A child living in Isleham fen who was suffering from diphtheria had to be taken to the fever hospital in an open cart, there being no means of getting the ambulance up to the house, and it died the Monday following. Another child, aged nine, had to be carried on a stretcher for a long distance until the hard road was reached. The Fen Bank Drove serves a number of dwelling houses and three public houses together with the school which was built in 1879. Men have been employed filling up holes and now that there is a great amount of unemployment this is a favourable time to put the road into repair

1930 02 18

A special train was chartered to bring Mrs Albert Maltby, who lives at the West River gatehouse, near Ely, into Cambridge. The wife of a railway employee he was engaged in feeding her chickens when she slipped on the icy ground, breaking her leg. The gatehouse is in a part of the fens almost inaccessible save by the railway so a special train consisting of engine and brake was sent out to take her to Cambridge station from where she was conveyed to Addenbrooke's Hospital in the Borough Police ambulance 30 02 18

1930 11 06

Little Thetford was the scene of a big blaze, a large six-roomed thatched house built in 1300 being totally destroyed. After the old roof dropped the four main walls were a roaring furnace and the blazing embers carried long distances. Soon nothing was left but burning beams and scorched walls which had evidently been built of the old Fen mud. But for the efforts of villages similar large thatched houses nearby would have been involved. The 'Three Horse Shoes' public house opposite was plied with ladders and a chain of buckets formed and water thrown on the thatched roof to stop a possible outbreak here. The cause is a mystery. Fireworks were being let off, but not at this end of the village 30 11 06a

1931 02 13

The Over postman, Alfred Adams, complains of the neglected state of the village byways. 50 years ago the old surveyors knew how to keep the main by-ways in repair for they had use of gravel dug from the Bare Fens which the farmers carted. But now Long Drove which led to the Boat Inn was almost impassable. The postman was supposed to be able to cycle but now had to walk and farmers grumble as they cannot get to their fields. 31 02 13h

1931 04 10

St Ives residents are concerned they will be deprived of the use of their river this summer because of engineering repairs at the stanch. The continued low water is not only ruinous to the boating industry but will also affect the acreage under osiers. At present the engineers had only put in a pair of fen gates, which was the easiest task of the lot. They should leave the remainder of the work until autumn. But very soon repairs would be started at Hemingford Lock 31 04 10g

1931 04 10

Alderman Harry Gleaves Few was born at Willingham in 1848 and spent long years in the service of his village: he was a founder of the Star Benefit Society, Building Society, Water Company and Village Hall and one of the builders of the Willingham Baptist Tabernacle. He was in business as a corn merchant and became an expert in fen drainage. During the Great War he served on the Military Tribunal with his eyes open for the country's need of both soldiers and farm workers. 31 04 10 i j k

1932 01 29

In the fens thousands of acres of land are below sea level, dependent on internal and main river drainage works for their existence. They paid heavy Internal Drainage Board rates in addition to Catchment Board precepts. But land bordering the river above Earith and Cambridge derived benefit by that work but did not pay. The fens could no longer bear the cost of carrying their water to the sea. It needed very large sums to put rivers into satisfactory condition and make good the neglect of the last 100 years, but Government revenue had disappeared. 32 01 29

1932 02 18

Ely Allotment Association complained of damage caused by 2,500 rats on Bridge Fen that had dug peas out of the ground. They made a special effort with 20 men, ferrets, dogs and guns but only managed to kill 50 of them. The rats were attracted by clumps of sugar beet tops being left but the council refuse dumps were worse than the allotments. At Prickwillow rats came from two to three miles to get to pigs, and they did not know what to do. 32 02 18 & 18a

1932 03 16

Stonea near Wimblington is composed of three public houses, a chapel, a few farms and a fen drainage engine or two. Mrs Naomi Parr, the wife of the engineer of the Middle Level Commissioners' pumping engine is jubilant as she had drawn Pelorous Jack in the Irish Grand National Sweepstake. She has received many congratulations on this piece of luck and has

already received the tempting offer of £2,140 from Irish Pools. But she is determined to take her chance 32 03 16

1932 03 31

Methwold and Feltwell Internal Drainage Board was in a bankrupt condition; it owed £10,000 and could not find the money to run the pumping engine. There was a risk of flooding 25,000 acres of the finest fenland in England. Many other boards were in the same condition. The whole of the fens had cost more than four times their value in draining. 32 03 31 & a

1932 08 26

Sir - Swavesey RDC repaired the bridge at Webb's Hole some years ago but have for a long time been lax in looking after it. How many of the old rights of way between Swavesey and the Ouse are now available for the public. Where are the stiles? How much is left of the footbridge over Covill's drain on the right of way to Holywell Ferry and is it possible to get to Overcote across Middle Fen, as in days gone by? – Fisherman 32 08 26j

1932 09 02

Mr J. Wentworth-Day of Wicken learned journalism on the 'Cambridge Daily News' and wrote the biography of Sir Malcolm Campbell. He recently dined with the Duke and Duchess of York who displayed great interest in the bird sanctuary at Wicken Fen. He also flew in the first aeroplane to land on the tiny island of Sark in the Channel Islands 32 09 02d

1932 09 23

Huntingdon county council should take over the Tick Fen Road. At present it was a private road and if it required repairing the expense fell on the owners. On the question of drainage, Alderman Tebbutt said the Ouse Catchment Board had not got a single man with any real experience of fen rivers. They were very able young chaps but there was only one man who really understood the position, Capt Matthews, and he was now dead. 32 09 23d

1932 12 09

Floods, bad harvests and bad prices were blamed by the owner of Gravel Diggers Farm, Chittering at the bankruptcy court. For nine years he was also licensee of the "Gravel Diggers" pub, Cottenham Fen, but he did not sell a barrel of beer a week and it closed last September. The 1932 harvest was "a rum 'un", the most disastrous he'd ever had: his land was all flooded during May and he'd had to borrow money. 32 12 09d

1933 01 21

St Germans' Sluice was opened in 1877 but the fens continued to shrink as drainage progressed and the tideway silted up. Once there was a four-foot fall from March whereas now there was practically none and a north-west wind could affect the outfall by two feet. The new pump was probably the largest in the world. The men working on the huge scheme were glad to have jobs in such depressed time. 33 01 21 & a

1933 01 27

Skating at Lingay fen – 33 01 27a

1933 06 15

The malaria mosquito is still very prevalent in Wicken Fen, but the disease has died out. During the war, when a large number of troops came home suffering from malaria they were bitten by mosquitoes which then became infected with the parasite and spread the infection to many people who had never been out of England. This state of affairs lasted for six years but has now died out. Scientists do not fully understand why the insect is no longer infected, the Rotary Club was told. 33 06 15

1933 07 20

Harold Archer died in the same house in which he had been born in Ely on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1845. That day residents first saw a locomotive engine that had been sent by road on a horse trolley by the contractor to the Eastern Counties Railway to work the ballast train and make the Railway Embankment across the Cresswells. He played a prominent part in the city's affairs and became an authority on the drainage of the fens. 33 07 20

1933 08 01

The Fenland Research Committee, recently established at Cambridge, has already justified its existence. At Plantation Farm, Shippea Hill, they have discovered an interesting settlement of the early Bronze Age which has yielded a large number of flint implements, arrow heads and knives. Grahame Clarke also found traces of an earlier culture. When it is remembered that the archaeology of the fens has been practically unknown it will be seen that their discoveries are of much importance. 33 08 01

1933 09 21

Sir Frederick Hiam was concerned that if the pumps were stopped his land would be flooded. Some simply floated at such times: when a horse went on the land it went up to its neck and had to be dragged out with ropes. In 1912 the banks held but in 1928, after the Ouse Catchment Board took over, there was a break. His men were out all night to prevent the whole district being flooded. The Board can give an order, but they haven't the men to do it. The man on the spot knows what to do, people in Cambridge did not. 33 09 21, 22,23

1933 09 22

An inquiry into the new Ouse Catchment Board byelaws heard objections from Railway Companies. Their bridges might be damaged by storm or flood and signal wires blown down but they would be unable to repair them without permission: was their traffic to be held up while they got consent. Huntingdonshire County Council felt they would prejudice the growers of bat willows 33 09 22

1933 10 04

Railways are a never-failing source of interest to young and old. Cambridge Rotarians were told that trains between Cambridge and London occasionally attain 72 mph and tunnels on the Newmarket line were constructed so that trains should not frighten racehorses in training. In the fens one could stand 100 feet away from the railway track and be shaken like a jelly when a train passed. The outer rail settled half-an-inch owing to the 'draw' when the dykes dried and telegraph poles and even buildings leaned outwards. But the permanent way was practically immune from flooding. 33 10 04

1934 06 18

A barn at Carter's Farm, Pidley Fen, was razed to the ground. The roof of the granary was fitted with glass tiles and it is thought that the fire was started by heat from the sun. Somersham Fire Brigade was able to prevent the blaze spreading to the farm house but there was so little water that the Huntingdon Brigade returned to their base 34 06 18

1934 09 11

The new sluice and pumping station in the Middle Level at St Germans is a really wonderful piece of engineering, probably the biggest of its kind in the whole country. The drainage of the fens has resulted in a general settlement of the land which is now below the waters in the Ouse. Now there is a reinforced concrete sluice and three Gwynnes pumps driven by Crossley Premier Diesel engines to overcome the problem. 34 09 11

1934 09 20

An inquest was held at Isleham School on a lad who had fallen into the river in the fen. To get to the scene Dr McFeeters had to travel two and a half miles of very bad fen road. "A car

cannot travel down there in safety. I went on my bicycle because it was the quickest way of getting there and it took me 13 minutes. If there had been a main road I could have got there quicker and the result would have been rather different”, he testified. Neighbours carried out artificial respiration until he got there but there was no sign of life. 34 09 20

1934 09 29

St German's pumping station opened – 34 09 29

1934 12 15

Littleport Parish Council considered fitting their fire engine with pneumatic tyres. The wheels had been on the engine for 70 years and might have dry rot, all the wheels creaked and might break at any time. The men were afraid of them. In any case they would be compelled to have rubber tyres in 1939. The fire box was only seven inches from the ground and it would be no good on some of the fen roads. They could ask the Ely Fire Brigade how much they would charge to attend the fen fires, and scrap the engine. 34 12 15a

1935 03 03

Those who worked or lived at the First Eastern General Hospital huts in Burrell's Walk immediately after the war will be sorry to learn that many of the huts that were transferred from there to Manea for use as hen houses have been destroyed by fire. A big enterprise had been built up at Fodder Fen by Mrs Harry Crouch, who was a pioneer of the intensive system of poultry keeping. The long rows of sheds have been a familiar sight to those travelling by train but now about a quarter of a mile of them have been burnt. 35 03 30a

1935 04 26

Burnt Fen Drainage Commissioners presented James Luddington, formerly of Audley House Littleport, with a silver salver on his retirement as Chairman after 50 years. His father and grandfather had filled the post before him back to 1849. Sir Frederick Hiam said this was unique in drainage history of the fens. They were now one of the best-drained districts for which Mr Luddington deserved the greatest credit 35 04 26a

1935 09 27

Before the war the peat industry was flourishing and enabled families in the fens to obtain a livelihood from a natural product. There is still a demand for it as fuel in private houses and by nurserymen and gardens for horticultural purposes. Peat is obtainable in Cambridge at a cost of twenty-four shillings for 600 pieces (technically called 1,000) delivered. While not suitable for closed stoves and grates it is very pleasant for the hearth fires found in so many houses today. Pieces are 11x4 inches, are clean to handle and take up little room when stacked. It can only be dug in fine weather so orders should be placed as soon as possible with the Rural Community Council, Cambridgeshire House, Hills Road, Cambridge 35 09 27

1935 10 02

As a result of neglect of the river trees had fallen into the Great Ouse and the accumulation of silt had formed islands. In some places it had been difficult to find a river at all and some 500 miles had been cleared out. The River Board was endeavouring to keep a channel clear but weeds were a problem. The whole of the South Level is settling due to improved drainage by modern pumping machinery but the high river banks are also settling, faster than the fens themselves. At Denver the inrush of water brought in silt from the Wash meaning the bed of the river was rising, the Catchment Board's engineer reported. 35 10 02

1935 10 14

A hard road through the fen from Isleham to Prickwillow had become urgent owing to the Lark river bank being covered with gault by the Ouse Catchment Board, preventing its use by traffic. It had been used by people on foot or on horse and in 1788 tolls were charged at the Prickwillow end which had continued until recent years. A hamlet grew up with three public

houses before 1835 and a school built in 1879. But it was a private road that could not be taken over by the County Council until it had been put in repair by the owners of the land. 35 10 14 & a

1935 11 19

An agricultural labourer lost all his possessions in a fire which destroyed his cottage at Turf Fen, Warboys. Returning at 8pm he saw smoke and flames pouring through a window. He smashed in the front door with an axe and was able to recover some money belonging to his wife. This was the only thing he managed to save. The flames made short work of everything except the brick walls of the five-roomed cottage whose majesty was soon disturbed by the Ramsey Fire Brigade. When they found that water was not having the desired effect they pushed the walls over with poles. 35 11 19

1935 11 22

With the heavy rainfall of the last few days Fenland has to thank the vision of those who planned the pumping station at St Germans for the fact that there has been no flooding. The new sluice has pumped 2½ million tons of water and but for this the rivers would have risen six feet. Although the banks could have withstood the pressure, much water would have leaked back from the banks into the dykes so that the Internal Drainage Districts have been saved much expense. The Middle Level need not fear three times the present rainfall as the pumps were only working at a third of capacity. 35 11 22a

1936 02 04

Widespread flooding occurred at Huntingdon and St Ives which one motorist says looks like an island. The water in the Old West is within eight inches of the top of the bank and these are being heightened with clay on the low places. There is also heavy seepage on the Wissey, all along the Middle Fen banks, at Southery Ferry and the River Lark. All banks are being patrolled by day and night with tugs and barges in readiness to deal with any emergency. 36 02 04b

1936 06 06

An inquest on the body of Thomas Lawrence, miller of Haddenham, heard he had been thrown from his cart in Grunty Fen during a thunderstorm and had broken his neck - 36 06 06

1936 07 01

A large number of Methodists gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the Swaffham Fen Methodist Church. This is one of the outposts of Methodism, being situated about four miles beyond Waterbeach and three from Swaffham Prior. It is only reached with difficulty after travelling down lonely fen roads and crossing the river in an antiquated chain boat. It has been well served over a long period by the stalwart local preachers of the Cottenham circuit. Afterwards a picnic tea was held in the grass roadway near the chapel 36 07 01

1936 09 04

Dispute over dyke in Grunty Fen at Whitecross Road, Wilburton – 36 09 04b

1936 12 03

A family feud between van dwellers at Turf Fen, Chatteris, had a sequel in court. They had a grievance over some potatoes which resulted in a 'rare tussle' during which one man was hit on the head with a spade causing him to run to his van, load his guns and fire into the air to frighten his attackers. But some of the shot penetrated their van just missing three children. Police found 30 pellet holes in the side. The assault case was dismissed and he was fined £2 for firing the gun and £1 towards repairs. 36 12 03

1937 01 27

Flooding at Ely High Bridge – photo – 37 01 27

1937 02 16

An inquest heard that a bargeman's son had been in the habit of visiting the Half Acre pumping station at Barway. This had been erected in 1935 and contained a 10 horsepower crude oil engine. The engineer in charge said the lad had been standing with his back to the engine, looking out of the window. He was wearing a mackintosh which became caught in the flywheel. The man had run to stop the engine but the wheel took the boy round four or five times and his head hit the concrete. The flywheel had a projection for fixing a starting handle and this was not guarded. All other drainage engines were larger and let into the floor 37 02 16a

1937 03 15

The next 25 hours are the critical period in the fight against flood waters which are threatening a large area of fenland near Littleport following the recent heavy rain and high spring tides. A night and day watch is being kept on the rivers around Denver Sluice. Dredgers and barges are standing by ready to stop any gaps. The water has been over the banks in several places, but so far there has been no breach. Flood conditions have prevailed for eight weeks now – the longest period in living memory. The superintendent of Mildenhall Fen pumping station had no sleep over the weekend where the sodden condition of the banks has heightened anxiety. 37 03 15a

1937 03 16

A great battle is going on over a 50 mile front to save the fens from serious flooding. But in the minds of the hundreds of men working on strengthening the sodden banks is the ever present question 'Will the banks hold?' Despite their efforts the Old West River at Aldreth Causeway overflowed and nine inches of water poured into Haddenham Fen causing people to leave their houses. Great anxiety was also caused when water came over the banks at Willingham and at Lt Thetford where a split occurred in a bank 37 03 16 & a photos – Prickwillow, Earith, Stretham, Ship Inn – 37 03 16c

1937 03 18

Threat to Barway following Lode burst – 37 03 18 & a  
Soham Lode breach – photo – 37 03 18b

1937 03 19

Workers at the end of their tether – 37 03 19 & a

1937 03 20

New peril in the fens – River Lark, Hiam inspects – 37 03 20 & a

1937 03 23

The present flood conditions in the fens were raised in the House of Commons. A titanic struggle was going on between man and relentless nature. Children had been unable to go to school for months, housewives were marooned and unable to provide themselves with the necessities of life, crops had been destroyed bringing ruin to farmers and unemployment to farm workers. Half a million acres of the richest soil in the country were in daily peril during the winter. Much of the flooding had been caused to Government cuts in grants for land drainage, Arthur Greenwood declared 37 03 23

1937 03 23

Easter Sunday will be zero time in the second phase of the great battle being put up against the flood peril in the fens. Ten days ago the calamity of a major burst was only narrowly averted when the spring tides were at their peak. This weekend they return. Today all the cracks in the bank of the Old Bedford River were reported to be satisfactory and airmen who

had been working day and night have been withdrawn. The spirit of the troops is excellent but the medical officer has certified that rum is desirable and arrangements are being made for it to be issued. 37 03 23a

1937 03 24

James de Rothschild, MP for the Isle of Ely, ridiculed reports about problems in the fens. The pictures that had been conjured up of whole villages in a fever of anxiety for their lives and even of a panic-stricken population fleeing from their homes clutching their valuables, were totally fictitious. One village was said to have been evacuated but a very successful Liberal meeting had been held there. However despite the aberrations of the press the situation was still very grave and hundreds of acres were threatened with flooding. 37 03 24 & a

1937 03 24

Army return to fens, cracks in Ouse at Redmere – 37 03 24b

1937 03 27

The Ouse Catchment Board received a telegram from the King and a letter from the Minister of Agriculture saying they had watched with admiration the heroic efforts made to control the fen floods. Sadly a breach had occurred which led to the flooding of Soham fen. Last year Padnal had asked for a new engine but it had been turned down. As a result the old engine had broken and fens were under water. Unless something was done the South Level was heading for the greatest calamity it had ever known 37 03 27a & b

1937 04 05

Fen floods and compensation, new road at Soham Mere – 37 04 05

1937 04 21

Fenland is alarmed at another rise in the level of the rivers following heavy rain. The water is now 4ft 6in above normal, the washland is again flooded several feet deep. But the absence of rain so far today gives hope that a further disaster may be avoided. Even so the position is serious. Many fenland farmers have been unable to get on their land which is still completely waterlogged and much will have to lie fallow for a year, as it is too late to sow crops. 37 04 21

1937 04 21

Cambridge Photographic Club cine group presented its annual show. Mr W. King's "Flood" was a magnificent epic of the recent Fenland troubles with some really brilliant photography. "Close of the Day" recalled some of the scenes witnessed in Cambridge every afternoon at 5 o'clock and showed the evening's life of a typical couple. Humour and trick photography are the keynote of the film which was written and directed by Mr F.B. Ives and produced by Mr E.J. Twinn. 37 04 21a

1937 04 30

During the peak of the floods the river in Littleport rose to such an extent that several layers of sandbags were laid along Lynn Road to keep the water in. But a crowd of 250 people in a 'rough temper' had started to remove them. They claimed the bags had caused their houses to be flooded out and they didn't see why others shouldn't be flooded as well. They'd tried to stop River Board officials replacing them. This was a very serious matter as it would have harmed many people and caused damage in the fen 37 04 30b

1937 05 08

During the last three months as much rain fell on the high lands as fell on the fen land. There has been much more damage to the high lands than ever was done to the fens and thousands of acres will never have a spring crop sown this year. The damage to the high lands is many thousands, compared to the fenlands' shillings and pence. But the Middle Level fen men put

up a very fine advertising stunt, they are the finest Press agents that ever were and a tremendous lot of rot had been written about what had happened in the fens, Councillors were told. 37 05 08

1937 06 10

Nine men who worked on the fen banks at Soham Lode during the recent floods appeared in court charged with stealing a shovel each, the property of the Great Ouse Catchment Board. Several of the men said they had lost their own shovels and took another as 'compensation'. One said he had picked one up and taken it home, burying it in a sack in his back garden after he'd been told he would not get any money for his work. The Board had bought extra shovels which had been handed out before being branded; about 40 had gone missing along with 30 lanterns. 37 06 10a

1937 06 17

The RDC scheme for the collection of unburnable rubbish attracted criticism. In the old parts of Burwell the lanes were very narrow and it was doubtful the lorry could get along. Some houses had been left and in others the receptacle had been taken as well. The parish had turned down a cheap scheme which worked well for a dear one that didn't. But Barway and the Fen had help to pay for collection in the past and would now be part of the scheme. The outskirts of Soham would be cleared and the dump shifted to a covered dump at Fordham. In the old area collections were made so casually that to call them collections was an absurdity. 37 06 17

1937 07 14

During recent floods the water in the Hundred Foot Washes had been held up causing great hardship to occupiers. Yet their drainage charges have greatly increased. The water is let into the Wash area through the Seven Holes Sluice at Earith. But Welmore Lake Sluice which had only been built about five years is unable to cope. The Hundred Foot should be dredged: at Littleport it was only 30 feet wide. Alternatively the water should be let through the Hermitage Sluice into the Old West River and then out at Denver Sluice. But the washes were there for the express purpose of taking flood waters and grazing land was hired under those conditions. The problem is that rivers in the uplands have been cleared meaning water arrives in about a day, whereas it used to take a week. 37 07 14 & a

1937 09 07

Stacks, farm buildings, pigs and calves were destroyed in a fire which broke out at Dovecote Farm in the heart of Somersham Fen. The blaze was caused by self-combustion in a straw stack which had become overheated and, fanned by a strong breeze, made short work of the buildings. People hearing the cries of the trapped pigs and calves could do nothing to save them; the animals were roasted alive. The only properties to escape were the horsekeeper's cottage, a granary and a rather large cart shed. Fortunately a threshing tackle had been removed from the stack yard and the horses were in a field out of danger 37 09 07b

1937 09 29

Work on the improvement of the Wash estuary would be very expensive and not only benefit drainage. It could not be undertaken with funding from the Government, but they had no powers to take over the Wash without legislation and that would have no hope of passing. The Ouse Catchment Board were unhappy to have such a liability imposed that not one of them would have thought of accepting. The scheme was an experiment so far as the drainage of the fens was concerned and it would be impossible for internal drainage boards to raise the money. A start should be made on improving the outfall and a large scale scheme for the reclamation of the Wash kept in reserve 37 07 29a & b

1937 10 01

The Great Ouse Catchment Board considered anti-flood schemes costing over £300,000. Work was in progress on the Old West bank between Aldreth Causeway and Willingham flat bridge, and on Soham, Swaffham & Lakenheath Lodes where weaknesses were found during the spring floods. Draglines have been hired from several contractors as have several miles of railway track and over a hundred tipping wagons. At Manea they have opened up another clay pit and started re-facing the bank but have had to cross over several watercourses and make several substantial bridges. 37 10 01a & b

1937 10 27

Journalist H.G. Hodder told Rotarians he'd started his career at the CDN. He'd reported on the birth of the St Neots quads and on the death of King George V when he was one of 60 reporters crowded into the Feathers at Dersingham waiting for the news. He'd been accused of overdoing the 1937 floods but it was a good story at a rather quiet time and imaginations were stretched slightly. However it meant that the Government did begin to think what might happen in the Fens unless protection is improved 37 10 27

1937 11 08

Sir – I have 4,000 acres in Mildenhall parish so derelict that they cannot be farmed and bring ruin to the families who try it. Given one road to join the five cul-de-sacs and a bridge over the River Lark to a similar road in Cambridgeshire, all these families could get their sugar beet to Ely factory. If the counties won't share the cost of a bridge, a mile of Suffolk road would save the bank where it broke and temporarily corked itself one Sunday morning. It was almost a miracle that the fen floods did not culminate in a great and tragic disaster. But the banks and roads remain bones of contention in various stages of deadlock – Rev J. E. Sawbridge, vicar 37 11 08

1937 11 18

Mildenhall fen farmers let land go out of cultivation to avoid tithe – 37 11 18b

1937 11 26

The banks on the Reach, Burwell and Wicken Lodes should be raised and the main engine drain widened, the Ouse Catchment Board recommended. At Upware the old scoop wheel, engine and boilers should be sold, the building demolished and a new pump installed. Very few banks had broken in the fens in the last 20 years but those at Soham Lode had broken twice in the last 15 years. Last week the slips were very bad indeed. The County Council were pumping water from Soham Mere Farm into the lode - instead they should pump direct into the Cam 37 11 26 & a

1937 12 08

Over 20 fen men appeared in court for non-payment of Swaffham and Bottisham Drainage Board rates. One said it was nearly impossible for him to pay. "For two years we have been absolutely flooded out. We have a little corn remaining but cannot get a threshing machine down there because of the conditions left after the flood. We are next door to bankruptcy". Another said the farm he occupied had been under four feet of water for three months. The Great Ouse Catchment Board had taken over the district and a new pump had been ordered 37 12 08a

1937 12 08

W. King took film of fen floods last spring – 37 12 08

1938 01 11

Mr W. King showed three of his films at the Dorothy Café. The first dealing with the fen floods of 1937 had been seen before but the others were new. One showing the inspection of the Cambridgeshire Regiment by General Kirke caught the spectacle admirably: the marching of the Territorials was transferred to the screen in colour and many town and county notabilities were seen. Another showed the demonstration given by the Cambridge Women's Physical Culture Club, concentrating on the beauty and grace of their movement and showing the great advance they have made in the art of keeping fit by easy, pleasure-giving exercises. 38 01 11a

1938 01 28

The Great Ouse Catchment Board wanted to complete work on the Marsh Cut, extend the training walls into the Wash and improve the river between Denver and St Germans. Great work in the past has drained the fens, now they needed to keep the tidal waters out. But they would not proceed without further Government help. The fens had become a very valuable national asset and if a national emergency arose they would be of incalculable value. The Hundred Foot Washes had been flooded time after time for the benefit of other areas and that was absolutely ruining it. Half the wash was derelict but although owners could not let their land, they were called on to pay heavy drainage rates. 38 01 28b

1938 02 04

A new road linking Mildenhall and Prickwillow will probably be built in the near future to provide communications with the Sugar Beet Factory. It would metal a soft drove at Fodder Fen from West Row to the east bank of the Lark. But a new road away from the bank would be better 38 02 04 & a

1938 02 14

Fen dwellers again had to fight the threat of flood caused, this time, by a surge in the North Sea which resulted in an abnormally high tide sweeping up towards Denver from the Wash. The waves broke over the southern bank of the New Bedford River and the inner side began to slip away. An SOS for volunteers was flashed on a cinema screen at Downham Market and many in the audience rushed to the scene in lorries, cars and motor boats. More than 300 people, women as well as men, worked by the light of oil lamps in an effort to stem the overflowing waters. 38 02 14

1938 03 15

Padnal fen road at Ely should be finished 18 inches above the existing level to allow it to be better drained. Since the road lies under the bank the pressure of water percolating under it might cause the surface to break up as happened during the recent flood. The filling under the road should have porous material but if this is too expensive then there should be a row of field pipes under the road at the toe of the bank with drains every 200 feet, Ely council was told. – 38 03 15a

1938 04 08

Ely RDC discussed the large amount of water that continues to overflow from the water tower at Haddenham on to residents' gardens. Pipes could be put down to Grunty Fen, but people did not want it there. There was also the question of what the village would do if, in the event of war, the tower was struck by a bomb. But Mr Cross said that aircraft seldom hit their objective. Messrs Harding of Duxford's tender was accepted for the erection of three-bedroomed houses at Witcham but in future they should consider building two-bedroomed homes in view of the cost 38 04 08b & c

1938 05 26

Cawdle Fen Drainage Commissioners were sued by a farmer whose land was flooded in 1936 and 1937 when water flowed across the railway line. The sluice gates in the lock had been worn out for tears and water leaked back into the fen. The drains were grown up and had not

been 'mudded out' for some time. The gauge on the pumping station was out of place because the fen had sunk. In Lt Thetford they had stopped the old paddle wheel and installed two efficient pumps and it was not possible to drain Cawdle Fen without pumping. But the Commissioners said the system could not be expected to cope with abnormally high flood conditions 38 05 26 & a

1938 05 27

There is a real danger that there may be a break in the South Level barrier bank. It was in a very dangerous condition. Since a slip in February bags had been put on it but no gault had been used to repair it. Unless something is done before the high tides come next winter there may be a great disaster. In 15 years there would be another demand to raise the banks because the fens had fallen and the sea had remained the same. But they had so many schemes they had run out of money, Commissioners heard 38 05 27a &

1938 07 23

A farmer claimed his land at Wissington, near Stoke Ferry, had become waterlogged and flooded as the pumping machinery was quite inadequate and broke down frequently. An engineer said the engine was of an old type and the boilers were not strong enough to drive the pump properly. But the Ouse Catchment Board said they'd got a new drainage plant since it broke down in June 1938. Any problem was due to excessive rainfall and seepage from the river Wissey. Although some celery had rotted there was no damage to wheat. 38 07 23g

1938 07 29

The Great Ouse Catchment Board says £1.3 million must be spent on strengthening the banks of the Hundred Foot river between Denver Sluice and Welmore Lake, lining and dredging in the Eau Brink and Marsh Cut, construction of an intermittent barrage and training work in the Wash. The people who live in the fens are unable to pay for them so the Government will contribute 75% of the money. The fear was that they were spending money on a scheme which might not be an effective solution to the problem 38 07 29 & a

1938 10 19

The tenant of Alderbooke Farm claimed damages from Cawdle Fen Commissioners over flooding. Their pumps were insufficient and inefficient, their lock gates were excessively leaky and their dyke walls were not high enough. The judge agreed. The Commissioners had a duty to inspect, maintain and care for all their drains and drainage works and keep them in good condition. They did not have a sufficiently powerful pump nor spend enough on rebuilding banks. But the Act merely authorised them to do the work, it did not direct them to do so. The claim was dismissed 38 10 19b

1938 12 24

A farmer from West Row was fined for making and constructing a dam at no.6 culvert, Cooks Drove Drain, Mildenhall Fen without the consent of the Fen Drainage Board. The obstruction caused a settlement of the culvert heading causing a crack in the brickwork. The farmer said he'd put a board in the drain to supply water to his cattle 38 12 24

1939 01 12

The Old West River is very narrow and in normal conditions appears slow, lazy and far from dangerous. But now it has risen above its low banks, covering the washes and lapping against sandbags placed along the A10 road near Stretham Ferry Bridge. Four barges are tethered to willow trees, loaded with gault to mend the banks. It is a scene reminiscent of what happened here in 1937 when water ran across the main road to the low-lying fields beyond. A little more snow or rain will cause flooding 39 01 12b

1939 01 13

Ouse Catchment Board men have reinforced the bank running alongside the road on the Cambridge side of the bridge over the Old West River (at Stretham). The Old West River is at this point narrow but now it has risen above its low banks, and is covering the washes which extend from the normal water's edge to higher banks running parallel. Four large barges are tethered to willow trees. They were brought up from Ely loaded with gault to mend the banks. A little more snow or rain would bring it over the main Ely to Cambridge Road. The Ouse at Holywell is over its banks. The flood position at Welney yesterday showed little improvement, with 3ft. 6in of water over the road across the wash. Flooding is most severe at Brandon Creek and in the Hilgay area. 39 01 13 CIPof

1939 01 25

The fenland flood situation is very serious, with water six feet above normal. Patrols are watching the banks day and night and additional engineers have been sent in. At Littleport and Prickwillow waters have encompassed a number of properties and the occupants are preparing to evacuate. With further rain there would be as serious a threat of flooding as in 1937. Pumps at St Germans were operating at full throttle and Denver is pumping 11 out of 12 hours 39 01 28a Flood photos at Earith – 39 01 25, aerial pictures 39 01 28

1939 01 27

The Ouse Catchment Board agreed a scheme for Roswell Pits showing the proposed lay-out of the buildings, dock, roadways etc at a cost of nearly £5,000. Any old iron that may be on hand at the depot should be sold off. At present the yard is used mainly on the South Level Scheme but the time had come when it should be used for the general work of the Board. 39 01 27b

1939 01 28

Aerial pictures of flooding in fens – 39 01 28

1939 01 28

The fenland flood situation is very serious, with water six feet above normal. Patrols are watching the banks day and night and additional engineers have been sent in.. At Littleport and Prickwillow waters have encompassed a number of properties and the occupants are preparing to evacuate. With further rain there would be as serious a threat of flooding as in 1937. Pumps at St Germans were operating at full throttle and Denver is pumping 11 out of 12 hours 39 01 28a

1939 01 30

Flood precautions at Manea – pics – 39 01 30

1939 01 31

Flood levels in the fens remain high. At Waterbeach the Town Crier made a call for volunteers and rallied forty men to work on the banks of the Bottisham Lode. At Littleport station sleepers are covered and only the tops of the lines are showing. Goods trucks are standing with water beneath them. In the Holmes inhabitants have left before their houses were surrounded. At Swavesey Mow Fen and Middle Fen railway gatehouses have had to be evacuated. 39 01 30a pic Holmes flooding – 39 01 31

1939 02 01

Men at Barway worked in mud and water through the night to strengthen the sluice gates which divide Soham Lode from the main river. One large barge loaded with clay was wedged in the mouth of the lode. But when the bank burst huge clods of earth weighing many hundredweights were blown out by the water. The edges of the gap are so sheer and straight that they might have been cut out by a gigantic knife. With the earth went sandbags and all manner of other material used to strengthen the bank. Tarpaulin sheets had been stretched

over the top of the bank and held down by weighted sacks. Parts of these are now lying in the water swirling through the gap 39 02 01 & c

1939 02 02

Throughout the night 300 men patrolled between 3-400 miles of the banks of the Ouse, Cam and Lark. The patrols, equipped with field telephones are part of the extensive flood prevention scheme organised following the floods of two years ago. News of the gradual decrease in the water level has brought relief to scores of families who had abandoned their houses. A number have returned by boat to their homes at Barway and Soham and set about restoring order out of the chaos created by the water 32 02 02b

1939 02 03

After a week, the position in the Fen country is now easing. Throughout the night 300 men patrolled the banks of the Great and Little Ouse, Cam and Lark. These patrols, equipped with field telephones, are part of the extensive flood prevention scheme which was organised by the Catchment Board following the floods two years ago. The scheme is now playing a vital part in defensive measures against another flood menace. The news of the gradual decrease in the level of the flood water has brought relief to scores of families, who had hurriedly to abandon their homes. When the flood waters dropped nearly a foot a number of families returned by boat to their homes. At Barway, where five families hurriedly evacuated, men were building a dam to relieve the pressure of Water on the gates of the lode. Steel piles are being driven into the bed of the river. 39 02 03 CIPof

1939 02 08

Flood waters from the Ouse at Littleport have caused residents of a number of houses in the Station Road area to either evacuate their homes or live upstairs. It is not the first time this has happened and despite protests nothing has been done. Now ratepayers are demanding action. The council are proposing to build a concrete wall, three feet high. But residents from the Holmes believe this would flood their properties even more. Sewage matter from the homes was emptied on the gardens and it would be easy for bacteria to get into the flood waters 39 02 08a

1939 02 11

In March 1937 flood waters breached Soham Lode, causing thousands of pounds worth of damage. This year the same bank gave way to the enormous pressure of flood water, bringing a further trail of havoc. Natural seepage and pumps have cleared this away but at Swaffham Prior Fen about 1,000 acres are under water caused through seepage from the banks of the Lodes. Pumps have been going day and night but still farms are isolated and cattle have had to be moved. Distress warrants are being issued for drainage rates but farmers won't pay because they haven't any money 39 02 11

1939 02 24

A report proposes a new drainage canal about six miles long, between the Ten Mile River near Denver Sluice and a finishing point near St Magdalen's Bend on the tidal river. The water would be controlled by sluice gates at both ends with a battery of irrigation pumps. This canal would only be used in times of severe floods allowing water in the Ten Mile River to flow interrupted down the new canal, the old sluice at Denver being kept closed. The storage capacity would be sufficient to cope with the accumulation of water during high tide. 39 02 24

1939 03 31

Lands in the South Level are in greater peril of inundation than ever before owing to the rapidity of flood waters flowing down from the upland due to improvement of the upland water courses and because Denver Sluice in time of flood is impeded by water passing through the Hundred Foot River. The report by Sir Alexander Gibb should be examined, the

Ouse Catchment Board was told. But the Board's engineer had criticised it. "This is the most inefficient body I have ever sat on, far worse than the most incompetent parish council", one member complained. 39 03 31 & a

1939 05 12

Sir Murdoch MacDonald was appointed consulting engineer to the Great Ouse Catchment Board to report on the whole programme of the tidal river and whether a barrage is the right solution to the problem. He had worked chiefly in Egypt, built a bridge across an estuary in Scotland and was now working on a large harbour scheme on the West coast of England. He also had considerable experience in carrying out work on the Wash 39 05 12

1939 5 15

Sir – my criticism of the appointment of Sir Malcolm MacDonald as consulting engineer with the Ouse Drainage Board is that he is 72 years of age. This is rather old for such a tremendous undertaking since the Ouse is probably the most difficult river problem in the world. He is also a Member of Parliament and may not have time to give to the work. And the fee seems a lot. Mr O. Borer, the Board's skilled, resident engineer, is hampered by having so many Saturday afternoon members of the Board who adopt a parish pump attitude. – S.S. Wilson 39 05 15

1939 06 30

Midsummer Fires. — Motoring through the heart of the Cambridgeshire Fens on the evening of June 23—Midsummer Eve— (writes Watchman), a correspondent was a little surprised, but even more interested, to see an unusually large number of bonfires in the fields. He wondered if the makers of them were aware that they were keeping alive an age-old tradition. Most probably they were not aware of it. In former times it was the custom in the Fens, and in most agricultural districts, to have organised or traditional bonfires in the fields in the evening before Midsummer Day (St. John the Baptist's Day), also upon St. Peter's Day, which is June 29. Why the two bonfire nights are so close together cannot be explained (says the correspondent), but the old-time authorities are agreed that such fire were believed to exercise a quickening and fertilising effect on animals, crops and even mankind, as witness the old Irish custom of driving barren cattle through the flames of a bonfire to ensure progeny

1939 08 11

Cambridge-Lynn Canal.—A new canal from Cambridge to King's Lynn is being considered by engineers of the Great Ouse Catchment Board as a permanent solution to fen flooding. At present, however, the scheme is "in the air." Surveying is being undertaken to see if the scheme is practicable, and if it is found that it is, a full report will be submitted to the Board at a later date. It is probable that the new canal, if it is decided upon, will run from near Cambridge, via Mildenhall, Brandon and Stoke Ferry to Denver, and then to King's Lynn, a course which would take the surplus water from the highlands. The cost would be in the region of £2,500,000 CIPof

1939 10 20

Ouse Flood Water. — In spite of the serious flooding which has occurred in the Midlands, where the Ouse and Grand Union Canal have overflowed their banks, there appears little danger that the Cambridgeshire Fens will be greatly affected. Mr. Oscar Borer, Chief Engineer to the Great Ouse Catchment Board, said that although the level of the water at Newport Pagnell is 7ft above normal, the flood waters of the Ouse have not reached Bedford, and they should be dispersed before they can get down to the Fens. He added, too, that all the washes were empty. CIPof

1939 12 01

Ouse Catchment Board agreed that a pumping plant be installed where the Soham Lode enters the main river. As this was not possible before winter portable pumps should be readied in case an emergency arose 39 12 01a & b

1940 02 14

H.C. Darby 'Drainage of the fens' book review – 40 02 14c

1940 03 01

Hugh Wooll West, farmer and fen drainage expert, dies – 40 03 01

1940 03 29

During the last winter they had been through four serious floods, and had not had the dangers they'd had in other years. The sluice keeper at Denver had never seen the water go through as fast as it had this year. But the banks are much stronger now than at any time within the memory of living man, H.G. Martin told the Ouse Catchment Board. If no pumping station was installed at Upware it would be necessary to raise the banks of the lodes by five feet and taking the settlement into consideration the costs of maintenance would be £4,000 pa. The pumping station would cost £5,000 and the existing banks would be topped. Previously the practice had been to put in a puddle trench about six feet deep and to complete the lode banks on this basis would cost a further £5,500 40 03 29a

1940 04 19

Eeling at Bottisham Locks. — In a recent issue (March 22), writes Watchman, reference was made to a possible revival of a once important Fenland industry, namely eel fishing. A correspondent, who, about 70 years ago was born and reared within a mile of Bottisham Locks, once a famous place on the Cam for eels, is reminded of some interesting happenings and of an eel pie business there. About a century ago, the keeper of the locks was old William Robinson, who lived in a little cottage opposite the sluice gates with his wife and daughter. And he was one of the most famous, eelers of his time, working not only on the Cam, but also along the lode that runs from Bottisham to the locks on the main stream. He rarely used an eel fork or spear for catching eels, preferring the "eel-set" (snare) or eel-buck (trap), a kind of wicker tunnel closed at one end. The old lock keeper caught more eels than he could comfortably dispose of alive, and this led to the making of twopenny eel pies by his wife and daughter. On certain evenings the old fellow would go into Waterbeach village and at the Sun, Rose and Crown, Dog and Duck, Travellers' Rest, and other taverns marketed his wares. The fame of Robinson's eel pies, reached Cambridge, but before a branch business or "round" could be established in the town, the famous old eel catcher died and the business came to an end. According to my correspondent, who often discussed the eel trade with other eelers at the locks, the female eel is "very tasty, very sweet" and far better than the male of the species, the male being smaller and tougher than the female. CIPof 19 Apr 1940

1940 04 26

New drainage engine to be installed at Oxloade and oil engine should take the place of the Hundred Foot steam engine. Grunty Fen drainage to be improved meaning water comes at faster rate. A new engine at Oxloade would pump straight into the Hundred Foot and save it going 12-13 miles. Steam engine was extravagant; £378 spent on coal for 316 hours of work – 40 04 26a

1940 07 29

Concrete road to be constructed Swaffham Prior Fen but military had commandeered all cement – 40 07 29a

1940 09 27

Macdonald scheme for flood protection fens – includes 'cut-off channel' from Grantchester to St Germans – 40 09 27b

1940 10 15

R.G. Clarke, chief engineer Middle Level who saved fens from flooding resigns. He designed St Germans pump – 40 10 15b; funeral 40 10 29a

1940 11 01

Nazis Surrender to Woman. — When a Junkers 88 bomber was shot down at Stuntney, near Ely, on Wednesday afternoon, two occupants, aged about 18 to 20, threw down their revolvers and gave themselves up to a woman, who was the first person on the scene. The two other members of the crew, who had baled out by parachute, were captured in Soham Fen and taken to Newmarket. The machine had been badly damaged by R.A.F. fighters and was finished off by another fighter. The Nazi pilot crashed on Mr. Owen Ambrose's farm at Quanea Fen. Later, Mr. Ambrose told a reporter "The plane touched down in a ploughed field, jumped a ditch and came to rest in a beet field. The first person on the scene was Mrs. Ashman, who lives at the farm. As she approached the two men, they emptied their revolvers and threw them away. Other men from the farm came up and the Germans were driven away in a lorry by Mr. Brooks." The two who baled out were uninjured. CIPof

1940 11 29

Horse-sense on the farm,—A Fenland correspondent (writes Watchman) is of opinion that he can explain the word "Waukenmella," a term used by Essex, and perhaps other farm hands, when it is desired to instruct a horse to turn left, a Heydon happening to which reference was made last week. "Waukern-ella", or like-sounding word, he opines, is simply a corruption of the age long instruction "Whoa. Come hither," when a horse is to turn to its left. "In the Fenlands," he says, "whoa is now often omitted and only 'Come hither' used, but in other parts of the country, notably in Essex, the three-word instruction seems to be used, as it has been for generations." CIPof

1940 11 30

Ouse River Board, W.E. Doran appointed engineer – 40 11 30a

1941 01 24

Fighting Fen Floods. — The Special committee set up by the Cambridgeshire County Council to consider Sir Murdoch Macdonald's scheme for the protection, of the Fens against flooding will make their report to the Council tomorrow. The report includes a note prepared by the Clerk of the Council in which he recalls the three methods of approach which have been put forward at different times by different people. The methods are (a) Deepen the Tidal River. This is possible only if silt is prevented from coming in from the sea. It therefore means either a barrage to keep salt water and silt from entering the river or an extension of training walls to deep water, (b) Divert the water at Denver into a new channel parallel to the Tidal River. At some point nearer on the sea it would have to be pumped into the Tidal River. (c) Remove the upland waters to a new channel on the edge on the uplands, the new channel discharging below Denver and being available to receive (by pumping) the water awaiting discharge at Denver. CIPof

1941 05 29

Ouse Drainage scheme being delayed by serious shortage of labour; not enough for ordinary maintenance work – 41 05 29a

1941 06 13

Longevity,—Paragraphs in the London newspapers often tell of longevity in Cambridgeshire villages, particularly those in or bordering upon the Fens (says Watchman). In January, 1910, for instance, most of the daily newspapers told of Over being notable for its old people, saying that of a population of 860 there were 76 persons between 70 and 90 years of age. A remarkable instance of contemporary longevity occurs in the history of Oakington, a village

figuring in the old records as Hokington. In the year 1315, during the reign of Edward the Second, there were living in the village at the same time one person 120 years of age, two who were upwards of 100, and two who were 95 years of age. These facts were recorded in the proceedings in a tithe cause, recorded in the register of Crowland Abbey. CIPof

1941 07 14

Miracle of reclaimed fenland – potatoes grow on land that was derelict a few months ago At Feltwell Fen; new branch of the light railway known as ‘Bread and Butter Express’ and owned by Ministry of Agriculture – 41 07 14

1941 09 13

Briscoe Snelson has pictures accepted for Royal Photographic Society’s annual show; all of fenland scenery – rainbow over Reach lode, Reach, river farm at Fen Ditton – 41 09 13

1941 11 28

The "Old Clay Doot."—A Fenland correspondent (says Watchman) writes: "Clay doot and jill are old Fenland words, but I cannot at the moment trace their origin. My great grandfather (born 1800. died 1897), who was a boy at the time of Waterloo, and remembered the news of the battle coming to Waterbeach, often said he would "now have a cuff or two at my old clay doot," and he also often told me not to 'jill about' (be fidgety)." Half-shooter, long-sleever and Fassidge, says the correspondent, are new to him CIPof

1941 12 04

Great Ouse Catchment Board report and accounts publication prohibited because enemy might obtain information for operations against the country – 41 12 04

1942 06 19

King and Queen Tour Fens, - Their Majesties the King and Queen on Saturday paid a visit to reclaimed fen land in Cambridgeshire, and saw for themselves the magnificent work that is being carried out by the Cambs War Agricultural Executive on the vital food front. Indeed the whole five thousand acres at Swaffham Prior Fen and Adventurers Fen, Burwell is nothing more nor less than a battlefield where men and women, armed with the latest weapons of agriculture, are carrying out relentless warfare against rushes, scrub, bog oaks and flooding. Considerably more than half the 5,000 acres was derelict in 1939; the remainder produced only moderate crops . . . During their visit their Majesties travelled over miles of new concrete roads through Reach to Adventurers Fen, Burwell where they embarked on barges at Cock Up Bridge on Burwell Lode, which runs through artificial banks above the level of the fen. While the barges were sailing down the Lode demonstrations of blasting bog oaks by explosives were given CIPof – 42 06 15, 15a-b

1942 06 25

MPs tour fens around Swaffham Prior House, a hostel where 65 members Land Army reside – 42 06 25d

1942 06 29

Cottenham Methodist Rally, Swaffham Fen; although the chain boat at Upware was shaky and taking water badly the Ouse was crossed by many but others decided to try out the new concrete roads – 42 06 29b

1942 07 03

Murdoch Macdonald Ouse flood scheme explained – 42 07 03a

1943 07 09

Fenland Relic.—The Fens continue frequently to produce evidence of early settlement and recently the University Museum of Archaeology had brought to them a fine specimen of a Romano-British trefoil lipped wine jug. The jug, which is extremely well-preserved, was discovered by a Doddington man while roding a dyke. Noticing something protruding from the side of the ditch, he at first thought it was a tin lid, but further excavation led to the unearthing of the vessel. The museum authorities identified the jug, which holds about four pints, as "having been made at pottery works at Castor, near Peterborough, in the fourth century. CIPof

1944 02 18

Keeper of Wicken Fen.—Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Barnes, of Wicken, were present in the Balfour Library of the University Department of Zoology recently to receive from members of the National Trust Local Committee a presentation marking the completion of 30 years service by Mr. Barnes as Keeper of Wicken Fen. The gift consisted of a handsome black mahogany arched brass dial bracket clock, together with a cheque for £15. The clock bears a silver plate engraved with the inscription: "Presented by Members of the National Trust Local Committee to Mr. G. W. Barnes in recognition of 30 years' service as Keeper of Wicken Fen, 1913-43." The Master of Christ's (chairman of the local committee) made the presentation. CIPof

1944 02 24

Old Clay Pipes.—Among the many small and portable relics now being searched for and collected by visitors to Cambridgeshire are old hand-made clay tobacco pipes (writes Watchman). Really old clay pipes in perfect condition are now somewhat rare, but good specimens, most of them damaged, are occasionally dug or ploughed up in the Fenlands around Ely. These home-made clays of primitive design went out of fashion half a century or more ago, when machine-made ones were introduced. An octogenarian Cambridgeshire Fenlander says that when he was a lad short clay pipes were called "doots"; they were retailed in village shops for one penny, but later one halfpenny was the price of a new pipe. The usual price of a long churchwarden clay was threepence CIPof

1944 04 14

Witchcraft.—The recent witchcraft, trial in London (writes Watchman) was of particular interest to many of the oldest inhabitants of Fenland villages, where stories of witches and their nefarious doings may often be heard. Indeed, a writer in one of the London magazines about five years ago went as far as to say: "The Eastern Counties in general, and the Fenlands of Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire in particular, are still the hotbeds of superstition and witchery, and to some of the old folk in the most out-of-the-way villages, the witch's cauldron is as real today as it was to Macbeth." It was in the days of the Commonwealth that full rage against witches broke out (writes a Fenland correspondent), in Suffolk alone in one year 60 persons were hanged for witchcraft. After the revolution of 1688 the belief in witchcraft; began slowly to decline, but as; late as 1716 at Huntingdon, a Mrs. Hicks and her nine - year - old daughter were executed for "being in league with the Devil and raising a terrible storm of wind by taking off her stocking and shoes." Mother and daughter are believed to have been the last in England executed for practising witchcraft, the penalty being abolished in 1736 CIPof

1944 04 21

A Fenland "Twist". — A Cambridge reader (writes Watchman) having read last week's twists of speech tells me that they reminded him of something: he heard when sitting 'in an inn in the Fen country many years ago. He writes - Heavy rain was falling, and it was a very dark night. The landlord had opened the door and looked out several times. One of the customers asked him what he what he was looking for, and this was his reply: "It's raining dark and pitches pouring, and if that 'ere girl ain't home 'arf an hour afore soon she shan't go out agin no more yet lately. She served me so twice once afore" Apparently his daughter was out and expected to return. CIPof

1944 07 05

New fen drainage pumping station opened (name not given due censorship) – 44 07 05

1945 03 21

Drainage history lecture – mentions 1877 bill that each river and its catchment area should be under control of one authority but this rejected; also later debates – CDN 1945 03 21a, b

1945 05 04

Fen Roads, — Following conferences between the Roads and Bridges Committee and representatives of the internal drainage boards, Cambs. Council will be recommended on Saturday to approve grants towards the maintenance of fen roads. The report of the conference shows that after the County Surveyor had presented particulars of a census of traffic taken at the end of certain roads for five consecutive days, it was resolved to recommend that none of the roads be taken over as repairable by the inhabitants at large, but that a contribution be made to the cost of the maintenance of the roads, subject to certain conditions. The amount of the proposed contribution varies from 20 per cent to 5 per cent of the annual cost for the five roads mentioned. CIPof

1945 06 22

Birthday Honours. — The second section of the Birthday Honours List, published on Friday, includes the award of the O.B.E. to the following officials: Mr. J. M. McMillan Executive Officer of the Cambridgeshire W.A.E.C.; Capt. C. O Groom, hon secretary of the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Help Society for the Isle of Ely and Cambridge; Mr. McMillan was trained in Edinburgh, where he took a B.Sc. in Agriculture. He came to Cambridge in 1930 as organiser of Agricultural Education for the County Council, and at the beginning of the war was seconded to the W.A.E.C. He has been concerned to a large extent with fenland reclamation and the construction of concrete roads in the fens at Swaffham Prior, Burwell, Isleham, Over and Cottenham. The King and Queen saw some of the work when they visited Swaffham and Burwell in June, 1942. Capt. Groom is a retired Regular Army officer, living, at Wisbech, and takes a keen interest in the ex-Servicemen. He is president of the Workmen's Club and the Institute of Wisbech, and is also a director of Groom Bros. Ltd., who are farmers in the district. CIPof

1945 09 08

Bog oaks in fens article in Illustrated Carpenter by W.G. Undrill – 45 09 08

1946 03 02

Highest flood between Jesus Lock and Baitsbite Lock was 1917 when nearly two feet water over office floor; river bank broke Brandon Creek and flooded fen around Southery which quickly cleared water at Abbey Road – H.C. Banham – 46 03 02b, 46 03 09a

1946 07 08

River Lark overflows banks at Isleham – weeds block flow; teams battle on banks, NFS pump water – 46 07 08

1947 03 10

A night with one degree of frost, followed by the warmest day of the year, and then a night with no frost at all. This was Cambridge's weekend experience. This morning at half-past ten it was 35 and still rising. Work on snow clearance proceeded throughout the week-end in both borough and county with the result that all main roads are now open both ways and all by-roads passable. "We are hoping for the best" said Mr W.E. Doran, engineer to the Ouse Catchment Board this morning. He was asked about the prospect of flooding and explained that at present there is only a slight increase in river discharges. But a quick thaw will no doubt cause floods in the upper reaches. There is no immediate danger of a crisis in the fens

because there is a very large storage area available. "If the thaw continues slowly there is a very good chance of it passing off without undue trouble"

1947 03 19 c

The bank has burst at Ten Mile Bank and on the River Wissey and water is pouring through a thirty yard breach. A huge area of fenland is involved and livestock is being evacuated. Another breach has occurred in the bank of the Old West at Stretham and water is pouring in a torrent into Waterbeach fen. The waters of the Cam have dropped seven inches at Clayhithe but a break in the bank is feared about a mile and a half beyond towards Ely

1947 03 20 c

Over 200 men of the Beds. & Herts. Regiment were still working after nearly 24 hours with little or no respite in their fight against the rushing water from the breach of the Wissey. Throughout the night they filled sandbags by the light of hurricane lamps stacking them in a seven-foot wall along a mile stretch of the Ely to King's Lynn road south of Southery. The total area affected by the flooding is now more than 100 square miles

1947 03 21 c

An attempt was to be made this afternoon to rescue a bull marooned since Monday in a stall at Crane's Fen farm near Earith. It was hoped to borrow an army "Duck" for the attempt. Mr J Cook said it was standing in about two feet of water. "It seems quite happy but it may prove different when we try and rescue it. The job will not be easy as the animal weighs at least half a ton"

1947 03 24 c

"Operation Neptune", the scheme to seal the great gap in the banks of the River Ouse near Over by using Neptune amphibians began this afternoon. Nine Neptunes - weighing anything between 37 and 40 tons each – are being employed, as well as submarine nets and sandbags. One has its nose against the bank several yards from the breach and a number of others are in a field about half a mile away on the other side of the river. They will be brought to the gap, line up across the breach and netting will be dropped from them. Tarpaulins will be fastened over the netting and weighted down with sandbags.

1947 03 25 c

Under the glare of "artificial moonlight" "Operation Neptune" was successfully put into effect last night. Nine great amphibian tanks have sealed the breach in the River Ouse at Over. It was the first of its kind ever to be performed in England. The whole area was reminiscent of wartime, crowded with duffle-coated mud-caked troops many of them tired out but still cheerful enough to sing, and military equipment of every description. The operation was due to start at 5 o'clock but owing to technical hitches it was late evening before everything was ready to commence

1947 03 26c

Ready at a moments notice to help clear floods in the fens, 50 National Fire Service pumps are standing by in London awaiting the call from Cambridge. Up to midnight on Saturday last 600 pumps had been engaged for more than 3,000 pumping hours and 78 million gallons of water have been moved. Meanwhile fen river levels generally continued to drop today. The flow of flood water from the breach in the Ouse near Earith has been completely halted.

1947 03 27 c

It is thought it may only be a matter of weeks before the fens are drained again. Where pumping stations are out of action auxiliary pumps will be installed while other will operate from the various banks taking water from the flooded fens back into the rivers. Hundreds of millions of gallons of water will have to be taken off the flooded areas. The biggest fen pumps can throw 35,000 gallons a minute. Amongst offers of help received at the Catchment

Board office is one from Liverpool of an unlimited quantity of dehydrated potatoes for use in filling the breaches.

1947 03 28 c

On the subject of suitable cropping in the fens the National Farmers Union said today that provided that certain of the lands are drained within a month cropping may be possible - but one must bear in mind that the residue of artificial manure will have been completely washed away. Should the yield be low it would represent a financial loss and Government should guarantee them an average seasonal price on an acreage basis

1947 04 10 c

Flood clearance pumping is now being done by individual farmers in many places in the fen district. Some 25 small pumps have been issued from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries pump depot at Warboys. The depot maintains a "flying squad" which goes out day or night should any of the pumps cease because of need for service. Since the depot came into being at the former R.A.F. Pathfinder airfield it has dealt with between 120 and 130 units. The depot started from scratch with just three bare buildings of the deserted airfield. It is now a complete unit with canteen, and administrative office, petrol supplies and even facilities for doing a certain amount of servicing of motor vehicles if necessary. No sooner had it opened than a stream of lorries bringing pumps, equipment and what one man described as "an odd assortment of pipes" began to arrive from all over England

1947 04 28c

Field-Marshal Hermann Goering's Super-Mercedes bullet-proof car is going to help the Mayor's Fen Flood Relief Fund in Cambridge. It will be exhibited at Messrs King & Harper's Bridge Street garage. The car, captured by the British Army, weighs five tons with an engine roughly four times bigger than the average 8 h.p. one. The engine is equivalent in volume to that of the average-size bus

1947 05 18 c

Still more pumps brought over from Holland are coming into the Cambridgeshire fens to help add further food-producing acres to the thousands already cleared of flood water since "Operation Fenlands" began about two months ago. One, a 36-inch pump capable of throwing 110 tons of water a minute - nearly 25,000 gallons - is about to be installed on the Earith-Sutton road at Chain Drove. It will reinforce the battery of three 24-inch ones from Holland already operating there. Together with three similar pumps they can take over half a million tons every 24 hours off the flooded Haddenham Fen area. In other words they will clear daily an amount of water equal to Parker's Piece flooded to a depth of twentyfeet

1947 06 18 c

The fen floods and emergency payment to be made for damage done by them were the subject of discussion in parliament. The Ministry of Agriculture said it was a magnificent task on the part of farmers and workers to plant 1,950,000 acres of wheat. He mentioned that nearly 700,000 acres of agriculture were flooded. The floods were not due either to delay or negligence in carrying out drainage schemes, or to war-time drainage works carried out in the uplands. "We have no assurances that next winter nature may not break even the disastrous record of this year", he added. "Therefore much urgent work must be done if next year our river systems are going to be able to carry the volume of water that may descend on them"

1947 06 19 c

To-day, their work of pumping the floods off the Fens completed, National Fire service men who have been taking part in "Operation Fenland" left the area for their home station. The men were volunteers who came from all over England. One said: "Its good to be able to see some concrete results of the work in cleared land after so many weeks of seeing nothing but a vast expanse of water going down inch by inch". In many places you see a land of smooth,

dried grey mud, cracked into many-lined patterns by the heat of the sun. There is an air of desolation in the now-dry flood-wrecked farms. Yet the hardy Fen people are already moving back.

1947 07 02 c

Mr W.E.Doran, Chief engineer to the River Great Ouse Catchment Board, has announced plans costing £5,000,000 to prevent flooding of the Fens. The plans, which are described as being able quite definitely to give safety to the fens, are a modification of the scheme proposed in 1942 but shelved owing to the war. The 1942 proposal provided for the cutting of a new river from Denver to St Germans, with a balancing reservoir at Denver to accommodate the flow when the tidal door was shut. A new channel 30 miles long is planned from Denver to Barton Mills to cut off flood water from the high ground before it reaches the embanked sections of the fenland rivers. This channel up to the Lark is part of a previous scheme which provided for a cut-off channel going right up to Grantchester.

1947 12 01

How ant-flood scheme will work: McDonald scheme biggest project since Vermuyden; bank height limited by foundations which are 'a mixture of compost and toothpaste'; propose Relief Channel and Cut-off channel - 47 12 01

1948 01 29 c

The Great Ouse Catchment Board has put a price of £5 on the head of the coypu rat, as if it increased in numbers it could become a serious menace to the safety of the fens. It burrows into banks to make a nest, digging a long tunnel larger than a rabbit hole. "If floods came such holes as that might easily cause a bank to blow" said Mr W.E. Doran. The coypu rat is a South American species and is bred in this country for its fur. Several of the rats escaped from a farm in Norfolk. Two have so far been shot in the Catchment Board's area. One weighed 16 1/2 lbs and was the size of a terrier dog

1948 02 20

An £8,000 new "weapon" was officially added to the "armoury" of the drainage engineers fighting the never-ending battle of the fens. It is a 360 h.p. two-stroke diesel engine installed at the Ten Mile River Pumping Station near Littleport. Of the kind also used to generate electricity in ships it is the first in the country to be adapted by the makers for land drainage. Coupled to an already-existing pump at the station it will help to throw fen water into the river at the rate of 200 tons a minute. It replaces a steam engine installed in 1912

1948 03 11 c

Seven witnesses from fenland came to Cambridge to plead for better bus facilities to link their isolated homesteads with Ely market, but their case was preceded by a long hearing and the Traffic commissioners had time only to listen to two of them before adjourning the proceedings. Those unable to be heard waited from 11am to 6.30 pm. Before the Commissioners were applications by William Washington of Littleport to operate new stage carriage services between Black Horse Drove and Home Farm Drove (Hundred Foot Bank) and Ely. The applications were objected to by the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company. The applications were designed to cater for the area of fenland between Littleport and Southery, which, while highly productive agriculturally, was very isolated. At present it was practically uncatered for by a bus service

1948 07 29 c

The experiment of a socialist village was advocated by Cambs MP, A.E. Stubbs, in the House of Commons. "If I had my way I would take land and put it down to small holdings, properly equipped with buildings and so on. With the present shortage of labour the farmers can never get the manpower to farm it properly, but the land could be properly dealt with on the basis of a socialist village equipped a school and modern amenities. The roads which have been built

by the Ministry of Agriculture in the fens are all falling to pieces. It is about time something was done, once and for all, to give the agricultural producers a square deal. He ought not to have to sell lettuces at 1d each and find them selling in the shops for a "bob" each"

1948 09 29 c

The fear that the centre of gravity of the new Fen county to be formed from Cambridgeshire, Hunts., the Isle of Ely and the Soke of Peterborough would be at Peterborough and so cause Cambs villages to become forgotten backwater outposts, was expressed by the Chairman of the Parish Councils Association. The Boundary Commission have agreed to amalgamate the four counties and make a big new Fen county, to take Cambridge out of it and make it a new kind of county borough. "Histon and such like are quite big places at Shire Hall now, but we will have only a small voice at Peterborough", he said

1948 12 21 c

A further step towards the prevention of flooding in the fen area has been taken in the building of the Welches Dam pumping station which was officially opened and put into action. It had been decided that the reconstruction of the Low bank would be too expensive and there would be a continuous sinking of the peat fenlands behind. Comparative costs showed that a pumping station would be cheaper than building up the bank and be the most economical solution.

1949 11 16 c

Scheme involving an expenditure of over £6 million to prevent further flooding in the fens were discussed by a select committee of the House of Lords considering the River Great Ouse (Flood Protection) Bill. It seeks to empower the Gt Ouse Catchment Board to construct works and acquire land. The total catchment area covers over two million acres of which 400 acres were fenland, the richest agricultural land in the country. The average annual value of the crops grown on the fenland was £50 an acre, compared with an average of £25 for the rest of the country. In the most fertile parts the annual value rose to as much as £100 an acre.

1949 11 28 c

Over Fen Committee are vigorously building up their case to present to the Land Commission in order to prevent Over and Bare fens being taken over by the Government. To illustrate what could happen Mr Mealling said he bought a smallholding near Caxton Gibbet ten years ago. As a war gesture he allowed it to be cultivated by the Government, who had later extended this War Emergency Act to 1950. "My land was taken over and ever since I have seen men skim the cream off my land while I sit there wanting a living", he said. The Vicar said there were 80 fields in Bare Fen of about 3 ½ acres which was extremely valuable to the owners and occupiers, as it provided out-wintering for stock for which there was no other accommodation. If it is taken and blocked there are going to be men here who cannot graze or stock cattle

1949 12 12 c

A further 6,550 acres of Swaffham Prior and Burwell fens is to be referred to the Agricultural Land commission for consideration as to whether it should be taken over by the state. The Agricultural Act empowers the Minister to acquire agricultural land when it's full and efficient use is prevented by work not being carried out efficiently, or because equipment is not being provided or maintained. Opinion in the area is that considerable hardship could be caused should it be decided to recommend state ownership.

1950 01 17 c

Crowding into the Gardiner Memorial Hall at Burwell, fenland farmers and smallholders decided to form an action committee to fight a Ministry of Agriculture proposal to put 6,550 acres of lands in the Swaffham Prior and Burwell fens into state ownership. The area contains

a good proportion of large blocks of land of 100 acres or more. If the land were purchased it would be at compulsory purchase value, without consideration for potential value

1950 04 13 c

A new pumping station was opened at Chear Fen, near Stretham. Mr A.G. Wright recalled that the old station had opened in 1842. It had consisted of a beam-type steam engine powered by two boilers and coupled to a paddle wheel. It ran during the 1947 floods but only for a short time, when one of the boilers ceased to function and the other boiler only showed 35 lbs pressure. This plant was dismantled in 1949. In 1928 a new engine house was built, where a Blackstone Diesel engine was installed coupled to a Gwyne's pump.

1950 06 16

Judgement was given for the Great Ouse Catchment Board on claims against occupiers for maintenance work on drains done under war-time legislation. A Leighton Buzzard woman said the board had dug some ditches on her land using Italian POW labour. They took much longer than English labour would have taken. Another said he saw a number of Italians rabbiting and never saw any of them working. George Stevens of Wing said ten or a dozen Italian prisoners came to do the work on his land. Asked if they cut any rushes, he replied, "the only things they cut were my trees to make baskets" c50 06 16

1950 09 04 c

The proposal by the Minister of Agriculture to take over 700 acres of land at Isleham fen has not been confirmed by the Agricultural Land Tribunal who heard an appeal by 33 tenants against it. The Minister's proposals were in the best interests of food production but there was a large volume of evidence that the land could be better farmed in small units. The land had been requisitioned in the early days of the war and administered since by the War Ag. The Tribunal also decided not to confirm proposals in respect of Rectory and Top Farms, Hemingford Abbots.

1951 01 12

Major Marshall Nixon, deputy engineer to Mr W.E. Doran at the Great Ouse Catchment Board, was the man who, in the 1947 floods, suggested sealing the Over breach with military amphibious load-carriers. His suggestion proved highly success and earned him the Institute of Civil Engineers' 25-guinea ingenuity prize for 1948. He was made works engineer during the big rehabilitation and damage repair works following the floods c51 01 12

1951 02 01 c

The Agricultural Land Commission have completed their survey of Swaffham Prior and Burwell fens. They make proposals for improvements and repairs to equipment and for the claying of a substantial acreage of the lighter soils, most of which can be carried out by the owners and occupiers, and say there is no case for compulsory acquisition for the greater part of the land.

1951 The threat of possible flooding of the Cambridge-Ely road at Stretham Bridge has been met by the building of a quarter-mile long clay bank and the installation of three pumps. Mr W.E. Doran, the Catchment Board engineer said that the rainstorm that raised the level had travelled the length of the Cam basin & that with the present sodden state of the ground most of the rainwater drained into the river. Had the improvement work which followed the 1947 floods not been done river levels in some places would be above the danger line c51 04 10

1951 06 03 c

The Vicar of Over send a letter alleging that the Cambridgeshire Agricultural Executive Committee was not cultivating properly requisitioned portions of Over fen. On Monday heavy tackle began ploughing the land – and he sent another letter enclosing a sample of self-sown

barley which they are ploughing with heavy tackle. "Had I known this was the planned economy of the AEC I would have asked permission to graze 100 sheep on it, but apparently in the interests of maximum efficiency it must go under", he said

1951 06 06 c

Portions of Over fen which so far are uncropped sprouted a "harvest" of notices during the night. It is held under requisition by the Cambridgeshire Agricultural Executive Committee. At the corner of Sharp's Drove was the wording, "To the docks". This referred to 12 acres of that plant. Where the AEC has recently been ploughing-in self-sown barley was the wording "In the interests of colonial development 2ft 6 inches goes 'down under'"

1951 07 15 c

A petition has been sent to the King by the Vicar of Over about the hardship caused to owners of agricultural land at Over fen, held under requisition by the Cambridgeshire Agricultural Executive Committee which was not being properly cultivated. "My people have been deprived of their land for years on the grounds that they were not making the best use of the land for agriculture". They have been brought before Agricultural Land Tribunals and won their cases and yet have no redress.

1952 06 27 c

About 6,000 acres of the best fenland are devoted to the growth of celery, with an annual production of some 70,000 tons. Of this acreage 1,500 are in Cambridgeshire. At Whittlesey there are growers who earn a good living by producing celery crops for planting out in fields. Prickers-out get a wage of 30s. a day, if they are very good. During the lifting and trimming process one man lifts, one takes off the outside leaves and another removes the roots..

1952 08 22

Over Fen is not to be compulsorily acquired by the Ministry of Agriculture after all. The Agricultural Land commission had recommended the purchase of 535 acres to ensure maximum food production but they now need to restrict Government expenditure and will not proceed. The news is a great victory for the Vicar of Over who has led the fight against acquisition. On 2,050 acres of Lakenheath Fen, also recommended for purchase, the Minister say much would revert to its former derelict state if derequisitioned, yet the financial stringency prevents purchase now.

1952 11 06 c

The opening of a new branch of the Country Landowners' Association for the Isle of Ely was celebrated by a dinner at the Griffin Hotel, March attended by some 80 local landowners. Lord de Ramsey said the area contained the best farmers and worst landlords in the country – the sinking of the Fens was enough to discourage any Fen landlord from being too enthusiastic in improving roads or laying down concrete yards. Landlords had been looked upon as political and fiscal whipping boys between the wars but now had a very real opportunity of recreating rural life around them.

1953 02 12

High water levels on the River Cam have now dropped considerably at all points except at Bottisham Locks and all precautions for dealing with any emergency during the period of the Spring tides have been completed. A tide warning system will be put into operation; the number of patrols will be increased and emergency gangs, transport and materials made available at short notice. Coastal weather and tidal conditions are received by teleprinter at the Great Ouse River Board's Ely headquarters and police are ready to issue any necessary warnings c53 02 12

1953 04 09 c

About one in every 20 acres of fenland wheat sown last Autumn has been destroyed by the grub of the wheat bulb fly. In the Isle of Ely, which is worst hit, the proportion of destruction is as high as one acre in ten. Very badly affected fields may have to be ploughed up and re-sown. Added to the losses sustained by sea flooding in the same district this will mean considerable reduction in the wheat production in a year when the demand is for more cereals.

1953 07 04 c

A recent decision by St Ives Council to break up and dispose of an historic Fenland lighter – presented last year – has had serious repercussions. Before donating it as a museum-piece Mr R. Cory of Brinkley had received several offers for its purchase from people wishing to convert it into a house-boat. The hatches were not perfect but it could easily have been repaired. There was a considerable ‘bash’ in the bow as a result of an accident on its last trip when carrying sugar beet. It had sunk because of heavy rain, strong winds and a lack of interest and attention. A half-hearted attempt had made to raise it at the worst possible time. The barge is at present a total wreck outside the Norris Museum

1953 07 22 c

The Minister of Agriculture was asked In Parliament why Adventurers Fen in Burwell, which was derequisitioned last year, is to be handed back to the National Trust in view of their expressed intention to flood it. How much public money has been spent by the Agricultural Executive Committee and how did he justify making derelict good agricultural land by flooding? He replied that the research work done at Wicken was enormously important. The National Trust land covered about 280 acres and only 120 acres of the poorest and wettest land would be flooded

1954 02 02 c

The skating championship of the fens was held at Cambridge Sewage Farm when the Ralph Moore Cup was won by D. Beba of Moulton Chapel. As temperatures dropped still further last night, pipes became frozen up and water engineers were inundated with calls for aid. The new electrical apparatus for thawing pipes is intended primarily for use at institutions where a large number of people are deprive of water. There is only one machine operated by a skilled electrician who can deal with perhaps a dozen cases a day. No more orders can be accepted for three days.

1954 03 02 c

Mr Charles F. Morley, who died recently, was a cyclist who won the Eastern Counties championship for every distance from sprint to fifty miles. He was truly a great little sportsman. He was a founder member of the Granta Cycling Club & many of his successes were gained on the quarter mile circular dirt track of the University Bicycling Club off Grange Road. As a speed skater he was up with the amateurs of his day; he was elected chairman of the National Skating Association Fen Department and presented a handsome challenge cup. He was the sole survivor of a quartet of friends who made local and national history at the turn of the century including J.H. Priest, one-mile cycling champion, F.J. Christmas, cross-country champion and A.E. Tebbutt, amateur skating champion of Great Britain.

1954 02 25 c

The fight by farmers in the Swaffham Prior and Burwell Fens to stop the Government from compulsorily purchasing their land reached a public inquiry. It had been pasture until the Second World War forced the landowners to turn it into arable; much of the land had to be drained and concrete roads added. The Ministry claim the farm buildings were very poor and ought to be rebuilt but it was sheer madness to erected brick buildings because the land would not stand it, being black peat. It was not unknown for vibrations caused by passing lorries to cause buildings partially to collapse.

1954 05 03 c

Three farmers from Swaffham Prior Fen, who have for five years been living and trying to farm under the threat of Government acquisition of their land have been reprieved. Altogether 588 acres were involved but the Minister of Agriculture has decided only to acquire 312 acres at Hundred Acre Farm, Burwell Fen. The Rev Eric Marsh, formerly Vicar of Over urged the Ministry to speed up such decisions: no man was going to develop his land or improve it if he thought it would be taken from him. Mr Harold Sennitt, whose family has farmed in the district since 1927, had been threatened with the loss of 39 of the 45 acres of root crops he farms, Leonard Folkes five acres and Ernest Garner 90.

1954 05 16 c

The pilot of an R.A.F. Swift jet aircraft from Waterbeach airfield was killed when it crashed within 200 yards of a group of houses in Stretham fen. Had the blast from the aircraft, which exploded, gone in the direction of the houses then wreckage would most certainly have struck them. As it was pieces of the aircraft were strewn in a half circle for about 200 yards. Eye-witness Mr Leslie Pinion said: "the plane dived straight down in the field and exploded". It left a crater about 15 feet deep. Waterbeach was the first unit to be equipped with Swift jet fighters and the lightning-fast silver machines with their distinctive swept-back wings have become a familiar sight.

1954 05 30 c

Only a fenman can portray the fens as they are and capture their atmosphere and the characteristics of the people. To anyone else, says James Wentworth Day, 'It looks like mile after mile of black damn-all'. But they are rich in tradition and in his latest book 'A History of the Fens' he has tried to give a 'human' history before the 'spitting of the tractor' when it had a magic enchantment and fish were taken by the hundredweight from the lodes and drains. He describes the average fenman as 'still sturdily independent, often narrow-minded &, suspicious of strangers'

1954 11 21 c

A police officer began an inquiry after his curiosity aroused by seeing two boys' bicycles lying on the grass verge beside a fenland road near Soham. As a result 14 children, six girls, appeared in court. A thirteen-year-old girl was charged with having had relations with at least eight boys since 1951, mostly on the way home from school. "This sort of thing seems to be so rife in this district as to show a deplorable state of affairs", the magistrate said.

1955 05 05

A storm of brown dust is blowing high into the air over the Swaffham Fen area. Growing seedlings have been uprooted and plants torn from the ground by the near gale-force winds that have been raging in the past few days. It has caused serious damage to crops and important drainage ditches have been filled in. Farmers are now faced with replanting their crops. In recent years some of the landowners have been putting layers of clay on to the open fields to prevent any dust being blown about. 55 05 05a

1955 05 13

The County Council wrote to the Great Ouse River Board over the cost of metalling Fen Bank Road, Isleham. The road is used by their lorries in connection with the maintenance of the flood bank, this caused damage to the road and inconvenience to the farmers and tenants of houses to whom it was the only means of access. The cost of constructing a nine feet wide reinforced concrete road with passing places would be about £7,000. But the Board says their workmen had filled up potholes and left the road in a better condition. 55 05 13a

1955 07 16

The windmill at Adventurer's Fen, Wicken stands on a very isolated very isolated spot. The whole direction of the drainage was changed when the fen was brought back into cultivation

during the war. It could never again work in that position and may have gone the way of its neighbour in Sedge Fen. But thanks to Rex Wailes and Mr Doran of the Great Ouse River Board it is to be repaired and moved to the entrance of Wicken Sedge Fen where it will be seen by visitors. The work has been entrusted to Mr C.J. Ison of Histon who himself moved the post mill at Madingley to its present site. The cost will be borne by Lord Fairhaven. 55 07 16c

1955 11 16

An Agricultural Land Tribunal was told that land at Drages Farm, Woodfen, Littleport was full of weeds and crops were poor and light; thorn hedges were overgrown and fences non-existent. No drainage work had been done and the land was waterlogged. The buildings were in a very bad state of repair and a cottage was unsuitable for a worker to live in. But the buildings were just as bad in 1935 and were ready for demolition then, crops had been drilled late because of the weather and gave a fair return in the circumstances. 55 11 16-c

1955 11 29

Mr Peter Scott, the artist, television personality and authority on bird life, came to Adventurers' Fen, Wicken to open an artificially-constructed mere. Years ago the fens contained many such meres but the requirements of agriculture and drainage had resulted in their gradual loss. He said 'When the skies are full of jets and people are buying plots of land on the moon it is important to preserve ancient fen land'. The rights of farmers have been preserved and the mere will be a source of pleasure to bird watchers; hides should be erected and visitors admitted during the summer season 55 11 29 & a

1955 12 30

It was a Black Friday for six Black Horse Drove men stopped for cycling without lights. It was almost daylight on a dead-end road right out in the fens on which motorised traffic is absolutely nil. They only used the last half-mile for getting to work. But P.C. Miller said it had been a particularly foggy morning with very restricted visibility; some of the men did have lights on their bikes but they were not turned on. They were each fined. 55 12 30

1956 01 20

W.C. Squires had been a founder-member of the Cambridge Camera Club; he was a master of the technique of bromoil, his work being exhibited overseas, and an enthusiastic lantern slide worker. But he refused to lecture and many of his slides had never been shown. His speciality was the portrayal of open landscape and he aimed for a natural effect, be the conditions stormy or sunny. He loved the fen country round Reach 56 01 20d

1956 02 06

The British Amateur Ice-Skating Championship held at Bury Fen, Earith, was attended by eight skaters who had received trials for the British Olympic team. The entry of 32 was the largest ever known but the bulk of the competitors were London rink men and local skaters had little opportunity to shine. The Drake Digby Memorial Shield for boys resident within a 40-mile radius of March was won by A Bloom of Bressingham. 56 02 06

1956 02 14

Since 1947 the Great Ouse River Board has spent £950,000 on strengthening and heightening the banks in the south level in their aim to prevent a recurrence of disastrous floods. Part one of the scheme involved the cutting of a relief channel from Denver to King's Lynn. Part two: the strengthening and heightening of the banks of the Ten Mile River and the deepening of the river will begin this summer and part three, a cut-off channel around the edge of the fens will start a year or two later. But engineers are still not satisfied that if the same conditions reoccurred there would not be a break somewhere 56 02 14c

1956 03 01

## Storm over ploughed-up land Quy fen 56 03 01a-b

1956 07 21

A cantata 'Fen and Flood' for soprano, baritone, chorus and orchestra composed by Prof Patrick Hadley with words by Charles Cudworth will receive its first public performance at the King's Lynn Festival. It was originally performed privately by the Gonville and Caius Chorus and has been rearranged by Dr Vaughan Williams. The orchestration includes a wind machine. 56 07 21 a & b

1956 09 22

A fen drainage windmill has been re-erected in Wicken fen. Norman's Mill stood in Adventurer's Fen, a mile to the south, and was operating until the early 1930's after which it fell into disuse and suffered considerable interference by people visiting the fen. The restoration was undertaken by C.J. Ison of Histon. They discovered the right way to go to work by trial and error, guided by what they found when they dismantled the old structure. Little more than the iron parts of the wheelers and gears remain from the original mill 56 09 22a & b

1956 10 18

Frogmen, called in by Scotland Yard detectives, have carried out diving operations in a large drain about a mile away from Crowtree Farm, Farcet Fen, Huntingdonshire, the home of a missing 53-year-old farmer. Raincoated detectives also searched adjacent fields after bloodstains were found in his house and in his van which was discovered on a lonely cart track. Neighbours describe him as a quiet man, wrapped up in his work. 56 10 18

1956 12 14

The Low Temperature Research Station was set up during the Great War to investigate problems of preserving the freshness of food supplied to forces overseas and imported from abroad. They started with retaining the freshness of apples throughout the winter and have moved on to the storage of potatoes for the outdoor clamp, though the blackening of the fenland potatoes remains a baffling mystery. The most recent developments have been the radiation of foodstuffs to destroy bacteria. 56 12 14

1957 01 15

Farcet fen murder – 57 01 15

1957 04 18

Archaeologists led by Prof. Grahame Clark are excavating a Neolithic site at Mildenhall. Hurst Fen is a wild and desolate stretch of boggy heathland not far from the man Brandon road. Lady Briscoe of Lakenheath Hall investigated pieces of pottery and now polished flint axes, arrowheads and scrapers have been found, proving that 4,000 years ago there was a small community living in primitive huts. But the fen soil has destroyed all traces of bones. 57 04 18

1957 05 10

In 1941 common land known as 'Quy Fen', was given over to grazing. When the war finished it was re-seeded and hired by a local farmer. Then three years ago 50 acres was ploughed up, causing an uproar. Now the 'Quy Fen Enquiry Committee' wants the County Council to investigate the actions of Horningsea parish council where three councillors and the chairman have resigned 57 05 10a

1957 07 27

The drainage of the fens moved into a new era with the opening at Upware of a fully automatic electric pump. Lord Fairhaven pressed a simple button to start it in motion. It is the first electric pump in the South Level and can move 125 tons of water a minute from Burwell

Lode into the Cam. The existing pumps were 18 years old, were efficient and worked very well. But they would be unable to cope under abnormal conditions. 57 07 27

1957 07 27

Wicken Fen bird hide opens – 57 07 27a

1957 09 24

Eastern Electricity's rural development is almost completed. Apart from some farms and isolated buildings, all hamlets and villages have been connected but in the fens less than half the new houses built have electric cookers. They have been experimenting with helicopters to survey high tension lines and use a 'pole-hole borer' followed by a compressor rammer to push the poles into place, meaning 42 poles can be erected each day. 57 09 24 & a

1958 01 31

The level crossing at Low Fen Drove, Quy is to be reduced to an accommodation crossing so British Transport will no longer have to employ a crossing keeper. There will be unlocked gates for pedestrians with locked gates for vehicles for which keys will be supplied to the occupiers of land served by the drove. The same will apply to the crossing at Haycross Road, Burwell. 01 31b

1958 07 04

Farmers and smallholders are facing serious financial losses caused by flooding at Cottenham fen. About 400 acres are under water and crops worth thousands of pounds have been ruined after a large public field drain on the boundary with Rampton burst its banks following days of heavy rainfall. Farmers say the drain had not been draglined for ten years but that the River Board had adopted a 'Blow you Jack' attitude and refused even to loan their pumps. 58 07 04

1958 09 19

The Great Ouse River Board's flood protection scheme between Ely and King's Lynn is nearly at the half-way stage. Work started in 1954 and part one, including an 11-mile long flood relief channel from Denver to Lynn controlled by a head sluice is nearing completion. The deepening and widening of the Ten Mile River and Ely Ouse over a length of 19 miles has been going on for a year but the flood diversion channel has not yet been put out to tender. People in the fens will feel a lot safer when it is completed. 58 09 19 & a

1958 10 01

Ten years ago Eastern Electricity's Fens sub-area had been faced with a back-log of work. Some 171 villages and about 4,000 farms had been without a mains supply – but now all had been connected. They had enlarged sub-stations at Bassingbourn, Histon, Chatteris and March and erected new overhead power lines. There was an increasing interest in floor warming equipment which was very much a 'coming thing' and improvements had been made in meter reading. 58 10 01

1959 01 17

British amateur skating, Mare Fen, Swavesey – 59 01 17

1959 02 04

The remote Methodist Chapel in Swaffham Prior fen was built in July 1884. It has a pleasant interior with room for a congregation of about 70. Heating is by a small stove and it still retains the shiny brass paraffin lamps which have provided lighting since the chapel was built. But it is weather-worn and the average attendance is half-a-dozen worshippers. There used to be a small chain boat which enabled people to attend from the Waterbeach side of the river; this has since disappeared. It was nearly sold in 1953 but people in Stretham organised services and the chapel remained open. Now two families are opposing its sale 59 02 04a

1959 03 14

Mr Cyril Petch of Orchard House, Isleham will shortly leave the village to live in the London area. What his new work will be cannot be disclosed, but it is a job of national importance. He has an astonishing record of public service on Newmarket RDC, Cambridgeshire County Council and as Governor of Soham Grammar School. In Isleham he's been chairman of the Parish Council, Sports and Village Hall committees, playing no little part in getting the magnificent hall erected in 1952. As a farmer he organised the fight for the return of fen land after the war. There are few organisations in the district which did not benefit from his sound commonsense and wisdom. 59 03 14

1959 05 06

The Eastern Electricity Board has introduced five Auto-Call Alarms in the fens area. Should the electricity supply be lost the small transistorised machine rings up control at Thompson's Lane and with the aid of a pre-recorded voice tells the engineer that a fault has developed. If the number is engaged the machine waits four minutes, then tries again. The whole operation is repeated four times. It is a triumph for the Board's 'boffins' 59 05 06a

1959 10 24

In 1954 work began on a Great Ouse Flood Protection Scheme. The construction of an eleven-mile long relief channel parallel to the tidal part of the river was completed with the opening of a tail sluice at King's Lynn by the Duke of Edinburgh. He mentioned the great tidal surge of 1953 when over 1,000 acres of the Sandringham estate were flooded. Now a great anxiety had been lifted from many minds. The next stages involve deepening 19 miles of river as far as the Cam and the cutting of a new 28-mile long channel around the edge of the fens. 59 10 24 & 24a &

1960s The Cambridgeshire Collection has detailed newspaper cuttings files from this date

1960 01 15

Mr A.G. Wright, Chairman of the Flood Protection Committee of the Great Ouse River Board, has been awarded the OBE for his work in carrying out the huge flood protection scheme following the flooding of 1947. The channel outfall below the Tail Sluice is nearly complete and all work finished on the tidal river banks. Mattresses have been laid at the Wash barrier and contractors are now tendering for the third part of the scheme. "Only those who live in the fens can realise what it is to be flooded and what the effect of a protection scheme means", he said. 60 01 15c

1960 02 12

Miss Francis Turk of Buckden has written more than 35 romantic novels over the last 23 years. She is under contract to write two light fiction books a year and it takes her about three months from the first rough draft to its completion. Her latest book, 'Journey to Eternity' is an entertaining account of the various people who visit an old fen house. The story is told with understanding and imagination. One day she is hoping to write a family saga of the Fens 60 02 12

1960 02

Proposals to amalgamate Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, the Isle of Ely and the Soke of Peterborough into a new county have been described as 'local government gone mad' by the MP for Cambridgeshire. David Renton is also known to oppose any suggestion that Huntingdonshire should lose its separate identity and may resign from the Government if the proposal goes through. Major Legge-Bourke for the Isle of Ely says it is impossible for fenland areas to be efficiently governed by people who do not understand their special problems. The only MP to welcome the proposal is Hamilton Kerr for Cambridge City who says he is delighted that the claim for county borough status has been recognised. 60 03 02a

1960 07 08

Duke of Edinburgh visits Wicken Fen 60 07 08

1960 10 01

A St Ives boat builder has created a modern boatyard out of an old derelict gravel pit in 12 months. Mr L.H. Jones, who moved his business from Huntingdon, cut a channel through to the river and dredged out the bottom. In his workshops he builds anything from small launches to 30-foot cruisers which are used mainly on Fenland waterways. 60 10 01

1960 10 21

In the isolated Fenland village of Wicken, on a cold October night, the windows of the Hall were almost the only glow within sight, the record-player the only sound. Thursday nights, Youth Club nights, are looked forward to with enthusiasm. Powerful motor cycles stood parked in the dark outside, their owners playing table tennis and miniature billiards. There was a darts board, a stove, a canteen hatch and a very few girls sitting in a group. The record player standing on the platform at the end of the room was playing 'pop' songs. The club leader, a man in slacks and pullover, with a whistle on a cord round his neck, said it had 21 members, only four of whom were girls. 60 10 21

1960 12 07

Fenland formerly produced fine geese which were driven to London, resting at Goose Hall near Waterbeach. An old lady remembers seeing them set off from the farm, being first driven through wet tar and then fine grit which resulted in a kind of shoe that enabled the geese to walk many miles in comparative comfort. Turkeys walked too but were equipped with a kind of leather boot which lasted all the way to London. Although turkeys moved faster they insisted on taking a good rest for the night while geese plotted steadily along all the time, snatching food as they went and just resting for short periods. 60 12 07a

1960 12 19

A diesel engine pulling a trainload of coal leaped from the track at Stretham Fen in the early hours and plunged down a ten-foot embankment, trapping the driver and fireman. They were freed from the wreckage of the cab which was crushed as it ploughed into the soft earth, and taken to hospital. Investigators believe the crash was caused by a swaying wagon on a 60 mph parcels express which hit the 45 mph coal train. Eight wagons containing Christmas parcels jumped from the rails, ripping up tracks and bringing down telephone wires. Nearly 100 railwaymen worked to clear the main Cambridge to Ely line. 60 12 17 track back to normal – 60 12 19b

1961 11 22

Electricity Board representatives will tour the isolated droves around Lt Downham, Pymore and Fodder Fen, Littleport seeking views on a scheme to bring electrification to the last few Fenland dwellers. Every hand shot up when the 130 people attending a meeting in Downham School were asked if they would like electricity. But the cost of bringing it to the Downham droves alone is over £50,000 61 11 22b

1961 12 06

Coypu have been killed at Rampton, Lode and Bottisham during November along with 10 other in the Isle of Ely. The coypu grows to two feet long with strong orange-coloured incisor teeth and webbed feet. It lives in marshy areas and makes flat 'nests' of dry reeds. It is essential to seek out and kill them before they become established in the fens, causing heavy damage to crops and dykes 61 12 06a

1961 12 30

The British Amateur fenland skating championships at Bury Fen, Earith, were curtailed by snow falls. Skaters and spectators tried out the cleared patches and made a journey to the only

source of heat – a small hot-dog stand on the edge of the fen. Then the noise of a starting pistol presaged the whip of skates over the ice. Later the noise was changed to the gentler swish of drizzle and when this accumulated into small pools, the racing was abandoned. 61 12 30a

1962 02 23

Sir – I admire the paintings of Edward Vulliamy and hope there may be an exhibition of his work. I have two examples of his genius. One, dated 1929-31, is a superb watercolour of a drainage windmill that stood near Wicken Fen, the other is a pencil sketch of the windmill on Madingley Hill. They hang alongside other fenland etchings – R.W. Macbeth's 'Fen Flood', 'Potato Harvest in the Fens' and Robert Farren's 'Holywell' and 'Sunrise on Wicken Lode'. I hope I shall find somewhere that Cambridge people may enjoy them as I have done – William Farren, Milton Road, Cambridge. 62 02 23f & 24

1962 04 16

An electrical storm near Isleham was the most violent in living memory. It lasted only 15 minutes but behind it there was a trail of shattered fir poles, dead cable and a jagged crack running down a farmhouse wall. The storm hit the area with such force that the top half of electricity poles carrying 11,000 volt cable between Elderberry and Burn Foot Tree farms were split in half. Scientists have noticed that electrical storms are becoming more violent, especially in the Fens. The area around Burwell has always experienced storms of greater severity due, possibly, to an excess of iron content in the sub-soil 62 04 16b

1962 05 14

Some 28 miles of concrete fen roads around Isleham, Soham, Willingham and Swaffham Prior are to be taken over by the County Council over a period of up to three years. Cambridgeshire Farmers Union had requested they should be adopted and maintained at public expense. The Internal Drainage Boards had agreed to finance the cost of bringing them up to satisfactory standard 62 05 14

1962 05 16

The Littleport and Downham Drainage Commissioners first met at the Club Hotel, Ely, in 1756 and it was there they gathered for a celebration luncheon before driving five miles to Oxloodie for the opening of a £65,000 all electric pumping station. Lord De Ramsey switched on two 320 hp motors capable of discharging 270 tons of water a minute. Together with two diesel-driven pumps they will serve one-third of the area they administer. Two more stations will be built near Denver Sluice and at Littleport to bring a big improvement to land that was suffering from poor drainage through the gradual wastage of the peat. 62 05 16

1962 06 20

Eleanor Summerfield, the actress who stars in the film 'Petticoat Pirates' with Charlie Drake, and her husband Leonard Sachs, well-known as the chairman of the BBC tv 'Good Old Days' have bought a weekend cottage at Wilburton. Most Fridays they motor down from London with their two sons and at the moment they are attacking the garden. The cottage was advertised as having a river running by the garden and is in an isolated position. Mrs Sachs always thought she disliked flat country but as begun to appreciate the magic of the fens and the wonderful expanse of sky. The people are 'so gentle, kind and good natured' 62 06 20

1962 06 23

Two village railway stations may be closed by British Railways. Only five people a day use Black Bank station on the main March line; the buildings are gradually subsiding into the fenland soil leaving the former stationmaster's house in a poor condition. And only eight people a day use the 11 stopping trains at Harston station; by closing it they could save nearly £700 a year. 62 06 23

1962 06 30

About 250 people were ferried across the River Ouse at Ely for an open day staged by Appleyard, Lincoln and Company the boatbuilding company which was formed in 1944 from a business which had its origins in the early 1800's. The new factory has increased facilities for the manufacture of fibre-glass craft for sale and hire, expanding their fleet of ten cabin cruisers operating on the fenland waterways. 62 06 30a

1962 09 27

Huge sluice gates have been constructed as part of the £10 million Great Ouse Flood Protection Scheme designed to save the Fens from abnormal conditions. They will control the peak flood waters of the Little Ouse, Wissey and Lark rivers and allow them to be fed into the new 27-miles long cut-off channel due for completion next year. The new channel starting at Denver and ending at Brandon Mills will also provide miles of new fishing facilities and a new waterway for sailing enthusiasts. 62 09 27a

1962 11 01

Littleport and Downham Drainage Commissioners approved a new pumping station at Wood Fen-North Fen, Littleport - 62 11 01a

1962 12 07

John Shrive had osier beds at Horningsea and Fen Ditton until he died 40 years ago, employing five men to grow and cut them with bundles kept moist in the Green End ditch until needed. Most of the women of Fen Ditton were employed in peeling or cleaving on a casual basis, sitting on each side of the road with their bundles beside them. Stripped osiers were collected by horse and cart then taken to Mr Shrive's workshop in East Road where they were woven into baskets to be sold from his shop on Peas Hill. School reports up to 1912 list frequent absenteeism with children 'helping with rod peeling' 62 12 07a

1962 12 07

Reed and sedge plants grow wild in Wicken Fen. Reed needs to be cut annually in the depth of winter while sedge is normally harvested in the spring. In the past, cutting was done entirely by hand, the reeds being tied in bundles a yard in circumference and carried three at a time to the lode-side. There it was loaded into a flat-bottomed barge and pulled by 'one donkey power' to the stacking site to await sale. Today the donkey has been replaced by an outboard motor and the actual cutting is done mechanically with a tractor and Allen scythe. One may regret the passing of picturesque methods of the past, but they were very hard work and economically unrewarding 62 12 07d

1963 01 05

The Lands Tribunal confirmed an offer of £4,300 compensation by the Ministry of Agriculture following compulsory requisition of 75 acres of Burwell Fen 63 01 05a

1963 01 18

Wicken Fen peat digging industry – history and picture of Sennitt by W.M. Lane – 63 01 18a

1963 03 15

The battle of the fens is on with councils in direct competition with each other in efforts to attract more light industry and halt the migration of their populations. Chatteris has a good labour force but every day 200 women leave to work in factories around Cambridge. March has a large railway marshalling yard employing 1,500 people and wants industry in case it is reduced in size. Ramsey are trying to get firms from Middlesex, bringing 500 employees into the town. It has little to attract them but hope that 'bingo and the cinemas' will be enough amusement until it can grow. 63 03 15

1963 04 29

A million tons of fertile Fenland soil is to be given away. Standing 30 feet high and covering 100 acres it has been washed from sugar beet processed at the Ely Beet Factory over the past 30 years. They get about 30,000 tons of soil annually which is dumped nearby but has run out of space and it is cheaper to give it away than buy more land. It is used to make up gardens, bank up roads and fill in rubbish dumps. Anybody wanting soil has to arrange their own cartage 63 04 29a

1963 05 02

Emily Benstead of Littleport has been collecting for charity for nearly half a century – by bicycle. Her benevolent work started in the First World War and she has worn out three bikes, cycling thousands of miles and raising £1,500. She has been out in all weathers from deep snow to a heat wave, pedalling up to 15 miles at a time round surrounding Fenland. The Red Cross, St Dunstan's and Cancer are just some of those who have benefited as has St Matthew's Church. "She is a grand old lady who has done a wonderful job", said one villager 63 05 02

1963 07 12

Surveys of the Ely Ouse and Ten Mile River have shown that protective works are necessary along considerable lengths of the banks. Trials had been made of various methods of protection using specially manufactured corrugated asbestos cement sheets rather than fagotting. To combat erosion protection will need to be continuous for 310 chains – more than originally estimated – over a 3-4 years period 63 07 12

1964 07 10

Water may be let into the Old West River without detrimental effect on water levels or danger to agricultural land. With dredging it is the only hope of preserving it so that the public could enjoy its fishing, boating and other amenities. New disposal works at Over would eliminate existing discharges of unpurified sewage but future development would more than double the amount of effluent entering the river and some fresh water should be admitted through Hermitage Sluice. But the height of the river was only just below the level of the washes and if more water were let through there would be trouble halfway down the river 64 07 10c

1964 09 18

A.G. Wright saw 1,700 acres of his land at Haddenham swamped by the flood of 1947. Since then he has worked to avoid a similar disaster. He has a wide knowledge of fen drainage and has been responsible for many improvements meeting the challenge of Britain's biggest drainage scheme in the same way as he introduced mechanisation into fenland farming – with knowledge and a realisation of the enormity of the task. Now he believes the flood ménage is beaten. In honour of his work, part of the scheme will be named after him 64 09 18a

1964 09 19

A chalk inscription claiming the Great Ouse River Board's £10 million flood protection scheme was a 'waste of money' had to be removed from the Lark Head sluice at Barton Mills before it was opened. It marked the end of ten years' work on the three-part scheme which has included a 27-mile relief channel skirting the edge of the fens, the widening of the Ely Ouse and Ten Mile Rivers and the construction of a new 11-mile relief channel from Denver to King's Lynn. It is as great an engineering feat as anything ever attempted in this country. 64 09 19

1964 10 16

Electricity pylons are spreading rapidly to cope with demand: electricity consumption has soared from 200 kw. in 1960-61 to 12,000 kw today. Some of this is caused by the boom in sale of night storage heaters. But in one region in the fens the number of consumers has fallen. There are problems erecting pylons between Peterborough and Wisbech where piles

had to be driven deep into the clay below the fens, adding to costs. But this high capital investment will prove a bargain in the longer term 64 10 16d

1965 03 26

The Wash can be reclaimed by dumping 10,000,000 tons of ash from the Electricity Generating Board's coal-fired generating station into it each year, W.E. Doran claims. It would greatly increase the rate of land reclamation but care would have to be taken to ensure shipping channels were not impeded and that silt came in over the layers of ash to make the land agriculturally fertile. However this may be so expensive that it is not practical and water storage would be more worth while 65 03 26a

1966 09 23

Great Ouse River Authority open new HQ at Gt Ouse House, Clarendon Road; will be shortage of water; formed in 1920 to take over work Bedford Level Corporation – 66 09 23a

1966 12 14

Wash barrage plans not to go ahead say Government, farmers annoyed – 66 12 14c

1969 07 22

Waterbeach electric pumping station near locks in Ranold Road were installed last February, completed in May – 69 07 22

1970 06 25

Walter Lane takes photos 1947 fen floods – to be centrepiece Cambridgeshire Collection exhibition organised by Mike Petty in Guildhall – feature – 70 02 05; exhibition sets up – Mike Petty, Alison Barker, Clare Beatty - photo – 70 02 11a

1970 06 25

Ely-Ouse – Essex scheme – feature – 70 06 25 & 25a

1972 05 27 c

Hundreds of acres of root crops have been lost or badly damaged in the severe dust storms which swept Cambridgeshire fens yesterday. Farmers say it was the worst for 20 years. During the storm visibility was down to as little as five yards and trees were uprooted. Mr Fred Abbs, a manager of several farms totalling 1,000 acres at Swaffham Fen estimated today that he has lost more than 100 acres of carrots and sugar beet. Mr Abbs estimated the lost crops were worth about £2,000

1972 12 15 c

Ely may find itself heading downhill during the next 10 years unless central and local government come to the rescue, warns a report out today. Ely and the surrounding Fenland villages are among 16 "problem" rural areas listed in the Small Towns Study commissioned by the East Anglia Economic Planning Council. The report says the district is suffering; as agriculture becomes more mechanised there is a steady drift from the land but the influx of industry is insufficient to compensate. The result is a general rundown of the market towns and surrounding villages with fewer jobs, fewer services and fewer inducements to stay. The report urges inducements to industry to establish more factories in rural East Anglia

1973 03 11 c

An ancient forest of bog oaks has been dug up in a 10-acre field at Soham Fen. A contractor ploughing the field only three inches deeper than usual found his plough catching two or three oaks in every run across the field. Mr John Fletcher who farms the field said; "I've been cultivating this land all my life and only struck the odd one, but this year it is just as if there is a whole forest of them. It has taken four men with two tractors a fortnight to clear the field. Some of the oaks were 60 feet long and had to be cut into three parts before the tractors could

pull them out". A National Farmer's Union spokesman said "The oaks lie at the bottom of the peat soil on the hard sub-soil. By ploughing deeper Mr Fletcher has struck this level". He said: "Bog oaks are not as common around Ely as they used to be as most of them have been cleared. They are several thousand years old"

1973 05 18 c

The fens were yesterday swept by the most severe blow this spring, as high winds picked up the lighter peats in the Soham, Stretham and Mepal district, uprooting new sown crops of beet and carrots, which are particularly vulnerable. The blow appeared to be widespread and raged for several hours. There have been two blows so far this spring but neither has caused widespread damage. Last year, more than 10,000 acres of sugar beet had to be replanted after a blow at roughly the same time. A Soham farmer, Mr Guy Shropshire has been using a prototype machine which "plants" straw between vegetable rows to prevent wind damage on his 1,000-acre farm

1973 08 19 c

Only three boats took part in a demonstration cruise to draw attention to the Reach and Burwell lodes which were in danger of being closed and drained. But Great Ouse River Authority had already agreed to spend £155,000 in preserving the waterway. The lodes were constructed to drain the fens but the drainage has shrunk the peat soil so that the waterways and their banks stand above the surrounding land. Now the banks are wearing and leaking - flooding the land they were constructed to drain

1974 03 17 c

In barely twenty minutes the chairman, Mr Leonard Childs, pushed sentiment and nostalgia firmly aside ... and by the close of the meeting the Great Ouse River Authority was dead and buried. It seemed ambitious when vested with wider powers to replace the Great Ouse River Board in 1964. The board replaced the drainage boards dating back to 1920, which replaced smaller units ... and so on back into shrouded fenland history. The momentum of change gathers pace with the advent of the new Anglian Water Authority bringing a new dimension not only to water and drainage but sewage as well.

1975 01 10 c

Frogs are in decline in the fens but are turning up in East Anglia towns disclosed A.S. Cook of the Monks Wood Experimental Station. "Traditional breeding grounds have disappeared because of changes in agricultural practice which has destroyed many natural habitats. Frogs have adapted by becoming more suburban than rural and shown a marked trend towards towns with places like St Ives becoming very frog-rich areas". The revival of the frog had occurred partly as a result of children bringing tadpoles from the rivers to their garden ponds

1975 03 17 c

Mr Edwin Appleyard's partnership with a Shell oil barge has ended after 18 years. The 60-year old barge was first introduced to the fens from Holland about 1910 and was used for delivering tulip and daffodil bulbs growing in the fens to Ely station. It next became a cargo boat plying between King's Lynn and Cambridge before being bought by Shell in the 1920s. It was then used to supply pumping stations with gas oil. Now it has been sold to a canal and passenger boat operator of Manchester.

1975 04 21 c

The Government has given permission to the giant Shell petrol company to look for oil in south Cambridgeshire. The area selected extends from Gt Shelford up to Royston and southwards through Hertfordshire as far as Buntingford. In the west it takes in Ashwell, Steeple Morden and Gamlingay, while in the east it extends almost to Saffron Walden. The actual drilling areas have not yet been selected. Nearly six years ago an American oil

company planned to make test borings in the north Cambridgeshire fens. A few years before that tests were made near Saffron Walden. Nothing came of either project

1975 10 13 c

Denver Sluice, one of the great monuments of fenland engineering and a vital control point in the flood threats of the past, could soon be something of a white elephant. Its fate hinges on an investigation being carried out into the level of silt build-up in the Great Ouse river basin which the sluice may have limited power to control. The river systems increasing use for fresh water supplies through Grafham Water, the Ely-Essex water transfer project and proposals to regulate groundwater levels in the chalkland had reduced river flows and opened the possibility of silt coming in from the Wash.

1976 04 01

Farmers in the Waterbeach Fen and Swaffham areas were assessing the damage after what one of them describes as the worst fen blow he could remember in 25 years farming there. Huge black clouds hovered over the fens nearly all day as high winds whipped up the light soil and blocked many drainage channels in the area. The blow does not appear to have involved any other light peat land south of Littleport.

1976 04 16 c

Fenland villagers who bought cheap whisky buried it in their gardens and poured it down the drain as police began investigating the theft of more than 2,000 bottles from Whitemoor railway marshalling yard at March. Almost £8,000-worth of Haig and J & B Export whisky bound for the continent was stolen in three raids from vans at the yards. Some whisky was hidden a suitcase, some was transferred to lemonade and sherry bottles, and some of it was drunk.

1976 05 10 c

A flotilla of 14 boats sailed to Burwell in a "quiet demonstration" in support of preserving the ancient fenland waterways. The Commodore of the Cambridge Motor Boat Club, Chief Inspector Roy Hardingham of the city police said it was designed to make the point that the lodes should be protected for boating of all kinds, for fishing and because they were part of our heritage. Mr Geoffrey Woollard said Anglian Water Authority now seemed convinced that it would be foolhardy to destroy the lodes, which are reputed to date back to Roman times

1976 05 21 c

Cambridgeshire fire fighters are facing their biggest crisis in years as open water supplies throughout the county dry up. Previously they could have relied on open supplies like ponds and fen drains when fighting blazes in the county. Now they will have to summon water tankers to help them. The chief fire officer, Mr John Maxwell, said: "For the first time in many years supplies are so low they are not sufficient". Now urgent talks are being held with Cambridgeshire National Farmers Union in a bid to stop farmers burning straw and stubble later this year

1976 06 26 c

The fenland onion crop, worth about £9m., is being threatened by the drought. Rainfall has been so low that it looks as if there will be only about half the normal yield. About 5,000 acres of onions are grown on the Cambridgeshire black land but they have suffered from extremes of temperature. Summer rainfall has been less than half the average. The boom crop of the fens has played a vital part in boosting home-grown onions from 10% to 42% of total consumption. Prices are now about the £200-a-ton mark but the cost of growing the crop is narrowing the gap

1976 10 15 c

More than 500 women who make their living on fenland potato-handling plants are on short-time working because of the slump in demand. The plants, which prepare potatoes for powdered substitutes, chipping, pre-packing, crisping and the retail trade are only ticking over at a time of the year when they would normally be working flat out. As a result many poorer families are now caught in a poverty trap, working only 15 hours a week instead of 35. Even in normal times they earn between 60p and 70p an hour, which is well below the agricultural minimum of 91p an hour.

1977 07 02 c

A team of Eastern Electricity apprentices are cleaning away about 150 years of soot, cobwebs and grime from the boiler room of the old fen pumping station at Stretham. They hope to restore it almost to the condition it was when the engine began operating in 1831 and are repairing as many of the valves and water level indicators as they can. The apprentices will also install lighting so that visitors will have a better view of the room and lights will also be fitted in one of the boilers to show its interior. The engine, which was last used in the 1940s is a popular tourist attraction

1977 09 19 c

The fens are an area strange and largely unknown to outsiders. But far stranger is the portrait of the region just published in the "New Society". It presents a picture of an area struggling against poverty with people trying to bring up families on wages of £27 a week. Some live in council houses with a good show of vegetables in the garden but "grim and comfortless within". The article paints a picture of intermarriage producing subnormality, children whose slowness at school reflects their parents' lack of expectation for them – even the highest number of shotgun murders in the country. There are no redeeming features. Even the weather is described as grim, and community resources "at an unbelievably low ebb"

1978 04 10 c

A growing number of rampaging foxes are causing havoc among the hens and ducks of the area around Wicken Fen, but the warden doubts the foxes are breeding on the fen. Farmer Stephen Beckett of Isleham said: "Four or five years ago we didn't know what a fox was around here. But now we've got them all over the area. Six weeks ago my brother saw a group of three on his land". The secretary of the Naturalists' Trust said the fox population had gone up very markedly, but so has the rabbit population which causes more damage. Elsewhere huntsmen are complaining of a shortage because of a demand for red fox fur by the fashion industry. An uncured pelt can fetch £18 before the furrier and fashion house begin to mark up the price of the finished article.

1978 06 20 c

After three years trials a manager of one of Fenland's biggest farms – the 8,000-acre Hiams estate – is convinced that he has softened the impact of two of the worst hazards on the rich black peat – blowing and flooding. Keith Richardson believes that a German-made machine known as a cultipacker will provide better seed beds for root crops. The action of the machine in breaking clods and levelling without causing soil to compact too tightly, is the secret of its success and there is less flooding and blowing. The main problems have come when they hit bog oaks.

1978 07 02 c

Otter houndsmen are angry at a Government report which comes out strongly against hunting coypu, a large beaver-like rodent with a hearty appetite for farm crops. The pest is now invading the fringe of the fens after fanning out from its Broadland stronghold. The Eastern Counties Hounds, who this year celebrate their centenary, have been hunting coypu in greater numbers since otter hunting stopped eight years ago. Last year they killed more than 200 coypus and this helped hold down their population to about 8,000 in East Anglia

1978 07 03 c

A plant growing in the fens near Huntingdon could hold the key to a crisis being forecast with supplies of The Pill. Fenugreek produces a chemical which is a vital ingredient of the contraceptive pill. Now a small glasshouse of the plant has been produced together with a secret field which will boost seed stocks if the idea catches on. Much hinges on the attitude of the big chemical companies. At present they derive most of their supply from yams grown in Mexico, but there is now a ban on exporting so they have taken to producing it on the spot.

1979 02 02 c

The National Skating Association commemorated a hundred years of organised speed skating with a professional match at Bury Fen, Earith watched by 300 people. It was a Cambridge journalist, James Drake Digby, who set up the Association after he had covered the skating at Mepal during the great frost of 1878. He was so impressed by the achievements of the champion of the day, 'Fish' Smart of Welney that he determined to get rid of the cheating caused by heavy betting. He arranged a meeting in Cambridge Guildhall which led to the formation of the NSA with the Mayor as chairman and himself as secretary

1979 05 20 c

Farmers were weighting up the damage caused by the worst fen blow for several years. Fierce winds whipped up the light soil but they were highly localised. The worst affected areas were at Prickwillow, Stretham, Coveney & Chatteris where there were dust clouds all around but fortunately a cloudburst dampened the fields after an hour's blowing. Elsewhere orchards took a bad buffeting. A fallen tree blocked the Harlton to Haslingfield road for several hours and another fell at Cottenham. An invalid carriage was blown from the A14 at Papworth and two motorcycles collided in the strong winds.

1979 09 17 c

Eight miles of lodes in the Burwell district could collapse, causing massive flooding, unless £1 million is spent to consolidate them. Not everybody agrees they should be saved. Since fen drainage the peat has shrank leaving the banks 15-20 feet high above the surrounding land. If the trendy conservationist lobby is going for strict historical accuracy then it should support a project which reduces the banks, not raise them still further. But they are a vital amenity and one of the few havens of natural beauty in the region. If enough people feel strongly enough and are prepared to back starry-eyed ideas with cash then their conservation must be assured.

1980 02 08

Albert Gillett is fast gaining the reputation as 'The Bird Man of the Fens'. At his home at Black Horse Drove he has a collection of almost 200 British and foreign birds. The air is filled with clucks, coos, quacks, squawks and screams from birds of every size and description. At the back door visitors are met by the odd goose looking for a tasty morsel or a few bantams. Mr Gillett, who runs the post office, started his collection three years ago. Now all the cages, aviaries, pens and runs are filled with pigeons, ducks, doves, love birds and parakeets, to name but a few. But he is hoping to add larger varieties such as parrots. 80 02 08a

1980 06 11

The Isle of Ely Member of Parliament, Clement Freud, asked Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher whether she had plans to visit Grunty Fen where people were worried about the level of wage settlements. But she replied that the 97 residents were a very happy agricultural community with a low rate of unemployment and content under a Conservative Government. Dorothy Barker of Station Road, Grunty Fen, said: "It is nice of her to think of us" 80 06 11

1981 06 02

Clay may be excavated from Burwell brick pits as part of a plan to repair the eight miles of Cambridgeshire lodes during the next 20 years. The pits closed in 1971, have flooded and

become a nesting place for swans. But now the Anglian Water Authority wants to reopen them. Six five-ton tipper trucks would make 80 trips a day across the fen on temporary roads to keep traffic away from the village 81 06 02

1981 09 17

A young walrus has swum into the Earith-St Ives area. The saga began when keepers from Skegness zoo helped return the stranded creature to the sea. It was next seen in the Wash by bargemen at King's Lynn but attempts by a conservancy vessel to head off its trip into the fens proved unsuccessful. It has eluded an air-sea rescue helicopter on the River Ouse and the RSPCA is still trying to locate it. It is believed to be the first report of a walrus in Britain since 1954. 81 09 17b, 81 09 18a

1981 10 06

The Cambridge Co-operative Band took the brass band repertoire into a new era at Ely Cathedral when it performed the world premier of a symphonic suite called 'The Fenlands'. Composed by Dr Arthur Wills, the director of music at the Cathedral, it is the first major work scored for brass band and organ. It was recorded by the BBC for transmission later in the month. 81 10 06d

1982 01 14

Fenland drug taking – review – 82 01 14a

1982 04 26

A phenomenal epidemic of wheat bulb fly in the 1950s was responsible for nearly one third of the Fenland winter cereal acreage having to be redrilled. The devastation provided the impetus for the development of a whole range of counter-measures by Frank Maskell, an entomologist whose name has become virtually synonymous with the conquest of the cereal menace. He has just retired for the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service, Brooklands Avenue. 82 04 26c

1982 05 12

House prices in Cambridgeshire dropped by more than three per cent last year – and in some areas plummeted below 1979 levels. The biggest drop was in fenland where prices fell by nine percent, to £20,270 though the average price throughout the county was £28,035. In Cambridge prices fell to £31,855 but South Cambridgeshire is the most expensive place to live at £36,015 82 05 12

1982 06 16

'Fenland Suite', the first work ever specially composed for organ solo and brass band, was recorded by the Cambridge Co-op Band with its composer, Dr Arthur Wills on the Ely Cathedral organ. Enthusiasm for the piece and the occasion was obvious, "I like that bit, even though I wrote it myself", said Dr Wills during the play-back of the 'Wicken Fen' movement. 82 06 16

1982 07 05

One of the worst outbreaks of potato blight for many years is threatening a bumper Fenland crop. The Ministry of Agriculture says the disease is rampant on the East Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk border and could wipe out crops if left untreated. Farmers desperately try to counter it with spray. 82 07 05

1982 09 02

The Fenland Country Fair held at Swaffham Prior for the first time was so successful that it may become an annual event. It was the brainchild of Malcolm Hall and raised £2,000 to help pay for the building of a new youth centre. About 3,000 people watched lurcher racing, 120

local crackshots took part in a clayshoot, there was a sheep shearing demonstration and 50 ferrets ran in and out of drainpipes in a special tent. 82 09 02

1982 09 14

Some say it's a puma, others a panther and possibly even a cheetah – but whatever it is, a big cat has been causing quite a stir around Cottenham. The cat, bigger than a labrador, has been seen three times, most recently by Mrs Veronica Bailey who looked up from the sugar beet field where she was working to see it staring at her from ten yards away. Robert Norman of Turk's Head Farm, Smithy Fen saw one run into a field of cattle – it was sandy colour with great big paws - and Reginald and Dora Savidge saw one in their car headlights. 82 09 14

1983 02 28

Most pumping plant in the fens has been renewed with automatically controlled electric motors but some boards fear they are too dependent on mains electric and have made arrangements for farmers' tractors to operate pumps in time of emergency. 'Conservation' is another area of potential conflict: water-courses must be kept clear of aquatic vegetation, which proves unpopular. Progress is not helped by extremists who delight in ignoring all views other than their own 83 02 28 & a and 83 02 28b & c

1983 05 09

Cambridge Co-operative Band have recorded a powerful piece composed specially for them. The music by Dr Arthur Wills, the organist of Ely cathedral, is the four movement 'Fenland Suite' – the first for brass band and solo organ 83 05 09 p10

1983 07 17

Fenland weaver Mrs Ida Allen is setting up her looms to weave tweed cloth for a firm in Japan to make ladies' coats and skirts. Her tiny workshop in Witchford High Street is far from the traditional woollen industry in Yorkshire. There is nothing she cannot tackle since her husband, Frank, built her loom; she has made college scarves, curtains and material for monks' habits and although 75 years old has no intention of retiring 83 07 17 p20

1983 11 10

Josh Scott, one of the last marsh shepherds, has hung up his gun and binoculars and said goodbye to the life-style that has supported his family for more than 100 years. It was Josh who first introduced the practice of rounding up cattle on a scrambler motorcycle and jumping the ditches in the fen area around Welney. In 1967 his life changed dramatically when instead of shooting for a living he joined forces with Sir Peter Scott and set up the Wild Fowl Trust Refuge in Welney where he has been warden 83 11 10 p21

1983 11 17

Sir - Life in Burnt Fen is not very rich these days. There is no work in the area. The nearest shop is 4½ miles away at Prickwillow and the school is due to close with the children bussed to Littleport. To get to the doctor's surgery people have to take the train from Shippea Hill station to Ely. There is no village hall, no church, chapel, nor even a post office. It hasn't a pub any more and there are no clubs. Is it any wonder that half the people living in the council houses want to change homes – Harry Bye 83 11 17 p16

1983 12 01

Sir, Burnt Fen is not a community 'dying on its feet': the Women's Institute still flourishes at the village hall and landlord Mr Shackcloth welcomes people to the Railway Tavern. But that is all there is for entertainment. There is still farm work done by local people but now in this estate there are now two connected with agriculture, where there have been as many as 30. Not all tenants want to leave here. But I have now retired and am looking forward to a move when suitable accommodation is found in Ely – Harry Bye, Council Houses, Redmere, Burnt Fen 83 12 01 p23

1984 02 24

Fleam Dyke stretches across the open corridor of chalk downland between what were dense forests above Newmarket and the swampy fens at Fulbourn. Now it is a rich habitat for chalk-loving plants like the pasque flower orchids. Its maintenance was the work of the rabbit but when myxomatosis became established there was nothing to stop the advance of shrub. The footpath became covered with thorns and brambles. Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely Naturalists Trust has put in working parties to carry on where the rabbits left off and the Ramblers Association participate as part of their programme of footpath preservation 84 02 24 p24

1985 02 12

When Tom and Audrey Chipper arrived to take over the running of the Baptist church in the quiet fenland village of Isleham in 1972 they had no idea of the dramatic changes that lay ahead. They became Born Again Christians and since then the church has grown beyond recognition: the Sunday congregation is now around 350 and has formed a daughter church in Newmarket with a membership of 100. The church practices healing with praying, laying on of hands and anointing with oil. Four people have gone abroad to take up missionary work in Uganda, Nigeria and Pakistan. 85 02 12a

1985 04 01

Work has started on draining 600 acres of water meadow at Swavesey, described as an extremely valuable wildlife refuge. Cambridge Friends of the Earth say farmers' plans to plough up the meadows to grow grain – when Britain has a massive surplus – are financial madness. Every bit of this increasingly rare type of habitat is precious and they are threatening physical action to save the Cow and Mare Fen. But the Internal Drainage Board say people are worrying unnecessarily. 85 04 01

1985 06 21

Cambridgeshire County Council is to buy Mare Fen at Swavesey to conserve it as a breeding ground for rare birds, stopping a drainage scheme which threatened to destroy the nationally-famous wet grazing meadows. The controversy started five years ago when the Anglian Water Authority announced a scheme to prevent frequent flooding in Swavesey, Over and Willingham. This would have involved ploughing Mare Fen up for cereal growing. Now it will be left out of the scheme without affecting the rest. 85 06 21

1985 08 31

Manea has finally put itself on the map. After years of obscurity the rambling little village in the heart of the fens has beaten more than 200 others to win the Best Kept Village award. Judges described it as 'exquisite', 'a gem' and 'a real eye catcher'. Locals have been beavering away for months and have been helped by a poor summer. All the rain has meant that their grass stayed green. Head teacher David Wilson described Manea as 'a tight-knit place where people take interest and pride in their village' and butcher Jim Bent says it was community spirit that won the award. 85 08 31

1985 11 18

Cambridge Darkroom exhibition of Fen photographs – 85 11 18

1985 12 18

Mare Fen, 40 acres of wet grazing meadow near Swavesey which has been purchased by the County Council, will be maintained as an important refuge for rare wildfowl. But it could also be used for skating, marking the rebirth of a well-established local tradition. Friends of the Earth are pleased that its wildlife value has been recognised but are disappointed that the adjoining Cow Fen has now been drained to increase agricultural yield 85 12 18

1986 04 04

Ernie James is a real fen tiger and a marvellous storyteller. His remarkable memory is capable of making any fireside chat an enthralling yarn. Now he has set down his "Memoirs of a Fen Tiger". The book describes his varied life as ferryman, mole catcher, wildfowler, eel catcher and ice skater in the tiny village of Welney where he lives with his wife in a little white-washed cottage overlooking the Ouse washes. He's in demand by film makers and people who want to know about country crafts 86 04 04b

1986 07 07

The M11 London-Cambridge motorway should be extended as far as the new Humber Bridge complex. It would open up large areas of the economically-depressed fens thus encouraging high-technology firms. By relieving pressure on Cambridge it would bring down rocketing house prices that are forcing homes beyond the reach of first-time buyers and newly-weds, City councillors say. But the County transportation chief says the scheme is a non-starter 86 07 07

1986 07 21

Dr Otto Smail, one of Cambridge University's distinguished historians, took his degree at Sidney Sussex College where he remained for the rest of his life. He was an authority on the Crusades and built up a reputation for his friendliness, knowledge and skill as a tutor, taking classes on the history of the fens for the Workers Educational Association. A collection of essays has been published in his honour – a University tradition for eminent scholars – 86 07 21

1986 07 25

Coveney looks the idyllic English village. Ducks waddle freely across the green, gardens blaze with flowers and there is a clear view to Ely Cathedral across the fen. But when the village school closed its doors for ever last week, it seemed like another nail in another rural coffin. These days there is no shop or pub in the village of just over 300 people and only a once-a-week bus service to Ely Market. There is no doctor or dentist's service and even the rector is shared with two other villages. Now residents have banded together in an attempt to keep their community alive 86 07 25a

1986 08 16

Saberton's shop at Pymore, one of the oldest village stores in the fens, has closed. It began trading 65 years ago as a bicycle shop but soon started selling food. Vera Saberton helped out behind the counter during the war and has stayed ever since assisting her sister-in-law Joan run the shop. She has seen dramatic changes in people's shopping habits with competition from supermarkets leading to a decline in the traditional village shop. Now she wonders what to do with dozens of old advertising signs that have stockpiled over the years. 86 08 16

1986 12 19

The new 2.5 km Stuntney bypass, part of the A142 Fen Link Road project, was opened ahead of schedule. It has been constructed using the latest road-building techniques to ensure it does not sink into the soft peat. This was a recurring problem with the former stretch of causeway which was all ups and downs, like a Jollity Farm. Now special bitumen binders have been used to give more flexibility with nylon reinforcement to add strength. 86 12 19

1987 07 13

The AA were inundated by calls to motorists stranded in the snow and hundreds more were caught without anti-freeze as overnight temperatures plunged to -11C. The River Cam was iced up for the first time in five years and skaters were out in force on the flooded fen at Earith in perfect conditions of ice, sun and no wind. Many were practicing for the Fen Ice Skating Championships but for others it was pure pleasure. 87 01 13

1987 01 14

The skating French brothers from Peterborough are once again kings of the Fens. They dominated some of the fastest racing ever seen at Bury Fen, Earith. John French, a British Olympian at Lake Placid, beat Alan Fisher in one of the best finals of recent years to win the Fen Championship. His older brother Paul, who had driven through treacherous conditions from Cardiff, beat Willingham teenager Stephen Parker and Sutton-based David Smith for the Melton Morley Trophy. 87 01 14 & 16

1987 07 17

Broadcaster John Timpson officially opened a project designed to help the disabled enjoy the National Trust's Wicken Fen nature reserve. A community work team had spent the past year building a wooden boardwalk so that wheelchair-bound people and children in pushchairs can have access to the fen, which is waterlogged for most of the year. The route, which is supported on piles driven deep into the peat, takes them past different habitats including woodland, sedge and hay fields. 87 07 17

1987 09 07

People in Cottenham are furious at plans to more than double the number of gypsy caravans in the village. There are at present eight sites at Smithy Fen but now another 12 places have been granted permission by SCDC despite a petition signed by almost half the residents. There is only a single-track road, the school is already overcrowded and the village policeman already has enough disturbances to cope with. But the council say permission was granted as the site is well-served by a concrete road. The land had been left polluted by an oil operating company and it would be very difficult to return it to agricultural use 87 09 07

1987 09 23

A major new tourist attraction at Ely involving the creation of a working scale model of the fenland drainage system could draw thousands of visitors and create badly-needed jobs, two men believe. They have sunk several thousand pounds into a feasibility study and earmarked a potential site for the six-acre development. It would feature a model village and miniature cathedrals as well as working locks and sluices such as the Denver complex. This would allow visitors to understand the water control mechanisms with an elevated viewing area 200 feet long. Now they are looking for financial backing 87 09 23a

1987 09 25

Plans have been unveiled for a new town near Chittering, to be called Waterfenton. It would have 3,000 houses, a major shopping centre, schools, leisure park, swimming pool, ice-skating rink, hotel and its own railway station. There will also be a church, clinic and all the usual services including pubs, banks and garages, developers say. House prices will start at around £35,000, (about £80,500 now) making it attractive to people who can not afford homes in Cambridge. The project would provide at least 2,000 jobs and take about 20 years to complete. This is the 13<sup>th</sup> settlement plan to be suggested in the last six months 87 09 25

1987 09 28

The Fenland Witch is a new Saturday bus service set up to help villagers in the Somersham area. It will enable people from Pidley, Broughton, the Raveleys and Upwood to travel to Huntingdon or Ramsey giving time for shopping and linking to connections to Cambridge or Peterborough. The vehicle has been hired from Dew and Sons by a former bus driver more as a community service than a commercial venture. 87 09 28

1987 10 28

Consortium Development, the largest housing construction group in the country, announced plans for a new town in the fens. The proposals were unveiled minutes before the Government inquiry into the Structure Plan entered its final phases of dealing with proposed new townships. The combined finances of the consortium, which includes Barratt, Wimpey

and Laing, ensures it has the strength to go ahead with the development of homes for nearly 8,000 people between Wilburton and Stretham. But three-quarters of local villagers are completely opposed and will do all they can to stop it. 87 10 28

1987 11 26

A new pumping station at Upware, commissioned by Swaffham Internal Drainage Board, replaces an old diesel system dating back to 1929. Consulting engineer, Keith Stacey, says it was constructed in seven months by their own direct labour and they are pleased with the result. The new station has the capacity to pump 178 tons of water per minute into the River Cam from 12,000 acres of adjacent fenland. 87 11 26

1987 12 11

Anthony Day was born into a farming family in the fenland village of Wicken only yards away from his present cottage 65 years ago. As a youth he tried farming and after completing war service was accepted into the Cambridge School of Art, then studying at Reading University. He took various jobs to help him survive as an artist, shifting scenery at the Arts Theatre and taking evening classes but would go out on his motor cycle on painting expeditions into the fens. They provided him with an endless source of new material and now his pictures are fetching prices in the region of £300. They can be seen on the walls of many houses in the area 87 12 11

1987 12 30

Dennis of Grunty Fen a roaring success on Radio Cambridgeshire - 87 12 30 & a

1988 02 19

King John's treasure may have been found after a 30-year search. Two Cambridge professors have unearthed particles of silver, gold and copper deep down in the fen between King's Lynn and Wisbech. They think it is part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century treasure which was lost in the Wash when the King's baggage train was caught by the tide in 1216. Now they want to use the latest scientific methods to date their finds. If this matches then a serious commercial excavation can be started. The treasure is reported to include more than 100 silver goblets, staffs of office studded with diamonds and a gold wand that was a present from the Pope. 88 02 19

1988 03 15

The National Trust's Wicken Fen reserve wanted a new pool for wildfowl but the peat kept turning to mud when dug. So soldiers from 39 Engineer Regiment at Waterbeach set off three controlled explosions as a training exercise. When they had finished a TV crew asked them to do just one more, for the cameras. They obliged, so the Trust ended up with a hole much deeper than expected. The pool, about 20 metres square, will be home for moorhen, coot, fen dragonflies and freshwater plants. A hide adapted for wheelchairs will overlook it. 88 03 15

1988 04 26

A Neolithic Stone Age wooden building discovered at Haddenham is the earliest of its kind in Europe. The walls, floors and roof have survived the wet conditions of the fens, enabling archaeologists to learn about prehistoric technology and burial rituals. They want to see it reconstructed in oak and earth to look exactly as it was 6,000 years ago to become a new tourist attraction 88 04 26

1988 05 14

Two new railway level crossings are being installed on the line between Ely & March over the weekend. The crossings, at Beald Drove, North Fen, Second Drove and Black Bank will have automatic barriers. They are triggered by oncoming trains and mean the end of manned gates or barriers operated by signalmen. 88 05 14

1988 06 16

Tenants living in six council houses at Main Street, Prickwillow are finding their homes literally disappearing into the fens. They were constructed in the 1930s and the whole block including single storey extensions built in 1970 has tilted leaving the rear some 10 inches below the level of the front. The homes are not unsafe but the sloping floors are a significant inconvenience. Now those wanting to move will be given priority treatment and the vacant houses will only be let on a temporary basis to homeless families. 88 06 16a

1989 07 12

Pymore – or Pymoor as locals prefer – is a community of some 400 souls deep in the fens. The village has only recently become attractive to commuters, even now there are only a few of them and they use their cars to get to work because there's no station. There used to be a railway siding and a signal box on the Ely to March line, but it closed a decade ago. The village school shut eight years ago, though young families have moved in, attracted by cheaper prices. There is a social club where villagers can meet, but no pub – though local builder Alan Crook would love to build one if there were demand. In the meantime he is putting up a £135,000 four-bedroom chalet-style home in the centre of the village. 89 07 12

1990 01 24

Vital improvement work is needed to the fen drain system because of the Greenhouse Effect. Unless work is undertaken scientists fear a repetition of the disastrous 1947 floods. They want to strengthen and heighten the outer barrier banks along the Bedford Rivers from Earith to Denver. The level of the land has steadily dropped in relation to the sea, the peat fen has fallen by about five metres since the banks were built and the Greenhouse Effect is predicted to produce an annual rise in sea level of five mm. If the South Level bank burst it could cause damage totalling £23 million to homes, high-grade agricultural land, roads and railways. A burst on the Middle Level would be more serious because of the number of homes nearby. The landscape will see small changes as the banks are heightened but in the vastness of the fens these could hardly be said to be significant 90 01 24b

1990 05 30

Rising sea levels bring flood threats – feature – 90 05 30a, b

1990 07 09

Engineering project to protect fens starts; banks along Ouse washes from Earith to Denver will be heightened and strengthened; peat land has fallen five metres since barrier banks were built; a South Level bank burst could cause £23 million damage, Middle Level burst up to £34m. – 90 07 09a